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A  
LETTER

To the REVEREND

Mr. TONG, | Mr. SMITH, &  
Mr. ROBINSON, | Mr. REYNOLDS.

Occasion'd by the late

DIFFERENCES

AMONGST THE

DISSENTERS.

Wherein is Consider'd

The REGARD DISSENTERS ought to pay  
to *Human Forms in Matters of Faith.*

WITH

Some General REMARKS ON THEIR late BOOK.

To which is added

An APPENDIX, containing *Two Letters* sent by  
some *Dissenting Gentlemen* to their MINISTERS.  
And other Papers.

By a LAYMAN *Wm. Saunders.*

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N:

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Whence is Considered

The Regard Dissenters are obliged to pay



To which is added

the list of the names of the dissenters  
who have been admitted to the  
British Museum.

By A. A. M. A. M.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

1841

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REVEREND GENTLEMEN,



**T**HE Differences which have lately arisen among the *Dissenting Ministers* occasion this Address to you, which you will not think a Trouble, if it may in any Measure tend to promote a good Understanding with your Brethren to support any important Truth, and to clear some Difficulties and Obscurities, which often occasion a Variance between good Men who mean well on both Sides. I apply my self to you in particular, not only as you are accounted the principal Leaders on one Side of this Dispute, but as I have a personal Regard for you, esteeming you men who have a hearty Concern for the general Good of *Christians*, who are open to Argument, and who will not be ashamed to rectify any Mistake you may have honestly fallen into, nor neglect any Thing in your Power

to procure a just Peace and Harmony among *Protestant Dissenters*.

MY Name can give no Advantage to an Argument of this Nature, nor would it I think be any Prejudice to the Cause I engage in. Your publick Character makes your Names known to all, especially on this Occasion; and prefixing them to this Address can give you no Trouble which is unreasonable, or which the Nature of the Case would not require you to take otherwise. If you can make a just and full Vindication of your Conduct, or can prevent the evil Consequences of it; if you shall be satisfy'd it has been improper, I presume you will not take it ill of any one to give you an Opportunity of doing it.

THE Disagreement between you and your Brethren has arisen on this Occasion.

YOU together with a large Number of Ministers have of your own accord thought fit, tho' not called upon by the *Magistrate*, to subscribe, in a very publick Manner, your Names to certain *human Forms* which you conceive do express the Scripture Doctrine of the *Trinity*. The Reasons which, as I am inform'd, you gave for your subscribing such Forms were.

THAT you thought it necessary to bear your Testimony publickly to Truth.

THAT you would clear your selves from any Suspicion or Imputation of holding Errors which you thought dangerous.

I SHALL only here observe that none of your Brethren

Brethren had propagated those Errors, against which you thought it proper to bear your Testimony; and that you your selves were neither accused nor suspected of holding those Errors, and were therefore under no Necessity to vindicate your Character to any, for whose Approbation you could justly have a Regard: As to those who are Enemies to your *Name* and *Liberty*, as well as to all other *Christians* who will not agree with them in every Trifle, they surely could not deserve such a Defe-  
 rence to be paid to their malicious and scandalous Reflections. All the *Complaisance* and Regard you can shew to them will never engage them to shew any Favour to you, while you retain any Remnant of *Christian Liberty*, or Charity for your *Protestant Brethren*.

AFTER subscribing your Names, you desired the rest of your Brethren to join with you, which they for several Reasons thought fit not to do.

BECAUSE it was contrary to the Resolution you had in General taken, to proceed in the Consideration of some *Heads of Advice* that lay before you, which Method of proceeding ought not to have been alter'd, but by the Vote of the Majority. Tho' this is certainly the Rule of all publick Assemblies, and as such ought to be regarded; yet I think every one will agree with me, that being in the Right or the Wrong, as to such Matters, is of very small Consequence in this Dispute, and therefore requires no farther Consideration. The other Reasons which, as I understand

stand, they gave for their differing with you, are of far greater Importance, viz.

THAT voluntarily paying so publick a Regard to *humane Forms*, in Matters of *Christian Faith*, was not agreeable to the Principles of those who did in reality, as well as in Words, maintain that the *Holy Scriptures* were the *only and perfect Rule of Faith*.

THAT such a Proceedure tended to make an unnecessary Division amongst you, and in the Consequence would have the same Effect as *imposing Articles* on your Brethren, by the Reflections which zealous and ignorant Persons would make on those who would not act as you did, and the Prejudice such Reflections might occasion to their Characters as Christians, as well as their temporal Concerns.

THESE I take to be in Substance the Reasons alledged on both Sides. Those on one side have been printed, that every one may see what Principles they acted upon represented in their own Words. But I have thought it proper to avoid being tedious in representing, what is not necessary to bring this Dispute to what is, as I apprehend, the true Point of the Question.

1.) How far it becomes good and wise Men, especially among *Protestant Dissenters*, to shew a great Regard to human *Articles of Faith*.

2.) WHETHER you and your Friends can be justly charged with any ill Consequences, that may follow from your Conduct on this Occasion.

T H E

THE Spirit of making Articles, of fixing the Sense of the Words of God by the Authority of Men, begun in the early Ages of *Christianity*, was carried on under the *Papal* Usurpation, and has been followed by almost all *Protestant* Communities. So general an Agreement in this practice of all Men in all times, has so prejudiced the *Christian* World, that it is much more difficult now to convince Men that it is wrong, than it would have been at first, to have prevented it. However reasonable Men will still be prevailed on by Arguments, and some are by Providence placed under such Circumstances, as to incline them to be open to that Conviction, which it would be in vain otherwise to expect from them.

THOSE who have groan'd under *Oppression*, who have felt the Mischiefs of *Imposition*, who have still the Danger in View, one would think should easily be prevail'd upon to renounce those *Principles*, which have been the Causes of all their past Sufferings, and are the Seed of those they may expect hereafter. It may not therefore be improper on this Occasion, on one Hand to mention the main *Principles* of *Dissenters*, which are necessary to justify their Separation, and which, as I think, are the Principles of Reason and *Christianity*: And on the other, the *Principles* of those who are avow'd *Enemies* of their Liberty. The Principles of *Dissenters* I take to be these.

I. THAT *Christ* is our only *King* and *Law-giver*

giver, and the *Gospel* the only *Law and Rule* of *Christian Faith and Practice*.

2. THAT this Rule is sufficiently plain and clear, that every one who sincerely and honestly endeavours it, may know thereby whatever is necessary both as to his Faith and his Duty, and that in acting according to such Knowledge, he shall be accepted of God.

3. THAT one *Christian* has no Authority to explain this Rule, so as to be binding to another, but every one is to believe and practice what he finds in his Rule, or can infer from thence, and not what another tells him is there.

4. THAT the Weapons of Christians are Spiritual, and not Carnal, that Argument and Persuasion are the only Methods that ought to be used to procure Agreement in Opinion, that not only direct Force and Violence, but even *negative Discouragements*, as to worldly Interest, *Injuries* to the Reputation or Good-Name of any, are unreasonable and *Unchristian* Methods of procuring Unity.

5. That Love and Charity are the Bonds of *Christian Unity*; that *Uniformity* in Opinions, Words, or Ceremonies, are not necessary to the Unity and Peace which the Gospel requires.

6. THAT those who take upon them Authoritatively to determine for others, in what Sense they shall receive the Doctrines of the Gospel, and impose the same, do usurp the *Throne of Christ*, and lord it over his Subjects, by compelling them

to

them to give entire Obedience to their Laws, tho' against their Consciences, or subjecting them to all the Punishments which are in the Power of the Imposers to inflict.

THE Principles on which those Men have acted, who at first broke the Peace of the *Christian Church*, threw it into Parties and Factions, and at last brought it under the *Romish* Slavery; and of those Men who in these latter Days have oppressed and persecuted you and all other *Christians*, who would not tamely submit to their Will, are these.

1. THAT true it is, *Christ* is strictly speaking the Lord and King of *Christians*; but that since his Personal Residence on Earth, he has left the Government and Direction of his Subjects to certain *Vicegerents*, [who I think have always happen'd to be those who were by Temporal Power enabled to claim that Office.]

2. THAT the *Scripture* is a very good Rule in their Hands, who know how to use it, which ignorant People, and those who are so whimsical as not to agree with their *Superiors*, do not; that if every one be left to make the best of his *Bible*, all the Peace and Order of the Church will be broken, its Subjects rebel against its Governors, and the Christian Society be turn'd into a mutinous Rabble.

3. THAT in order to keep the Subjects of the Church united in Faith and Sentiment, it's proper for its Governors *briefly* to tell them what

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is the Rule in their own Words, and as they have extracted it with great Wisdom and Honesty, which perhaps the People may not so readily find in the Book at large ; and if any shall be so presumptuous as to question either their Ability or Integrity, such Arrogance is to be check'd by *moderate* and *wholesom Severities*, which ought to be no greater than are necessary to bring them to an absolute Compliance with Authority.

4. THAT Reason and Argument are the proper Weapons of an *Apostle* or a *Missionary*, to convince those with whom there is no other way to deal ; but that where *Christians* are brought into due Order, and are numerous, such Methods are too tedious and troublesome to be used with every pert Opposer of Authority ; there will be no End of Debate, if such Persons shall be at liberty to dispute as long as they can find colourable Arguments in so big a Book as the *New Testament* ; the Case is adjudg'd and settled already by competent Authority, here is the Law reduced to a few Words, *Assent*, *Consent*, and *Obedience*, is to be yielded to it ; and if that be refus'd, there are proper Sanctions, the *Keys* of the *Church*, and the *Sword* of the *Magistrate*, or when these cannot be conveniently come at, *Censures* and *Denunciations*, the offending Party is to be represented as neither belov'd of *God*, or to be regarded of Men.

5. THAT Unity in Opinion, Decency and Order, are necessary to preserve the Dignity of the  
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the Church and its Governours from the Contempt of Gainfayers, which otherwise may fall not only on their *great Master*, but even on *themselves*, who have taken such commendable Pains in reducing his Rule to Certainty, that thereby *Diversity of Opinions* may be avoided, which are only tolerable in the Schools of *Heathen Philosophers*.

6. THAT they only enjoin some few necessary Things, either to Salvation, or for the Good of the Church, that tho' there are many great Truths in the Gospel, yet there are but few of them there *declared Necessary*: That the collecting and *inferring* other Necessary and *Fundamental* Truths, which are not so plain, as to be seen by all in the *Gospel*, is left to the Wisdom and Care of the Governours of the Church, that tho' they have not yet thought fit precisely to set forth which, and how many are the *Fundamental Articles* necessary to be believed, yet they shall as Time and Occasion requires declare them. That in this they do not Usurp the *Throne* of *Christ*, or Lord it over his Subjects, but only lead them like faithful Shepherds in the right Way, and fold them in the *Pale* of the *Church*. That if the Sin of Hypocrisy and Prevarication, may sometimes be the Consequence of their Conduct, it is wholly to lie at the Door of the Offender, who may, if he pleases, suffer the Penalty of the Law, and preserve his scrupulous, tho' erroneous *Conscience*.

THIS I take to be a true, tho' slight, Sketch of the Picture of these Men, which view'd in one Light, is justly ridiculous, and in another Terrible and Dreadful, and which ought as the Case shall require to be expos'd either to the Contempt or Indignation of wise and good Men: This Spirit and these Principles, are what they ought always to detest, as they have already, and will at all Times as far as may be ruin *Christianity*, and drive true Religion and Common Sense out of the World. If once this Authority of making Articles of Faith be allowed to fallible Men, every one may easily see the Consequences of it.

*Ecclesiastical History* shews us (which I think is the greatest Use of that Study) that under the Colour of supporting the great Truths of Religion against Error, weak and passionate Men took Occasion to enjoin their own Opinions, founded on mistaken Interpretations of *Scripture*, or on false *Philosophy*, as Principles of *Christian Faith*; some Articles and Determinations have been founded on blind and ignorant Zeal and Passion against their Opposers, others on Interest to support some *profitable Doctrine*: This at last ended in that numberless Heap of Absurdities and false Doctrines, which are all equally *Fundamental* in the *Romish Church*.

THIS is not only the Fact of History but follows from the Reason of Things; the same Principles will at all Times and in all Countries have

have more or less the same effect; Men in our Days may have more Knowledge and better Sense than formerly, but I fear their Integrity, Holiness, and Charity have not increased in Proportion, but that they will still make Use of all their Talents to carry on those Ends, which their Passion, Ambition, and Interest shall suggest. The Claim of Power is still kept up almost Universally, tho' pretended to be renounced in Words that signify little, and which do not in Truth disclaim it. That we are not again relaps'd into much the same spiritual Slavery that our *Ancestors* were under, seems to be more owing to remarkable Interpositions of *Providence*, and the Care of a wise *Legislature*, than to the Dispositions of those who ought to watch over the Liberties of *Christians*.

It will not be deny'd by almost any considering *Protestant*, that there is properly no Authority vested in any Body of Men to make Propositions of Faith, or to bind them on others; no Powers on Earth can make any Doctrine a *Christian* Doctrine that is not contained in the *Bible*; nor can they make any *Doctrine* more necessary to be believed by Christians than the Holy *Scripture* has made it before: So that all the Weight that any such *Article* can have, is only just in that Degree, and so far as it agrees with *Scripture*. It is possible indeed, and has often been the Case, that such *Articles* have contained more than the *Scripture* did warrant; and in that Case

case they are highly dangerous to true Religion. But supposing them to be such as they ought to be, that is a true Representation of what is contained in *Scripture*; even in that Case they seem not to be otherwise useful, than as Helps to understand *Scripture*, by bringing several Propositions relating to the same Thing together: But this is a Use in which they do not differ from *Commentaries*, *Concordances*, *Systems*, *Harmonies*, &c. which it would be thought Madness to give a *Publick Sanction* to. Nay I should think that *Systems*, and *Commentaries*, were as to their Usefulness far to be preferr'd before *Articles*: *Systems* not only laying down the Propositions to be assented to; but proving them to be true by Passages of *Scripture* and Arguments; which are the proper Means of convincing *Christians* of *Scripture Truths*: And from *Commentaries*, explaining the Meaning of particular *Texts*, as they lie in the *Bible*, when they are well understood, a *Christian* may form his Belief more surely, by comparing them together, than he can in the Gross on an *Article* without *Proofs* joyn'd to it, or if they are partial ones, mentioning only those Passages of *Scripture* which may seem to favour the Proposition, and neglecting those which may seem to oppose it. If the *Scripture* be suppos'd to be obscure and confused in Points of the greatest Importance, surely the Way to clear it, is not to reduce the Sense to a short Proposition of some few Mens composing without Authority; but *Christians* should in such a Case take the more Pains in reading, and examining the Rule: If they

they Assent to such Propositions on Account of the Learning and Holiness of the Compilers, this is a *human Faith*, this is building on a sandy Foundation, and can never become a *divine Faith*, 'till verify'd by searching the *Scriptures*, whether those Things are agreeable to them or not.

THE Authority and Dignity such Articles may be supposed to have from the Makers of them, is generally of the weakest Nature.

A NUMBER of Men are assembled, according to the Rule and Method prevailing in a particular Country, these are some Wise and Learned, some Weak and ignorant, some good Men, some bad Men, some Upright, and some Time-servers. This odd Assembly are to compile Articles, which are drawn up by two or three Persons, who have the greatest Share in publick Affairs, when they come before the Body, some of the Articles are assented to without Examination or Opposition, as having not happen'd to be controverted in their Days, there is no Spirit or Interest to oppose them, and tho' they have no better Vouchers than *Fathers* and *Councils*, they pass well enough: Others, which have been Matters of Dispute amongst them, in the Determination of which, their Characters and Reputations may be in Danger, these are contended for with Violence and the greatest Earnestness; tho' perhaps Matters, of small importance. Each Side tell Noses, make  
interest,

Interest, promise Support and Preferment, and use all the other Ways which are practis'd on publick Assemblies. Reason and Argument are not of the greatest Weight, nor are the best Men usually the Majority of such Assemblies. At last these Articles are voted by a great, or a small Majority ; and as the *Constitution* of the *Churches* may happen to be, carried by the *Proxies* of those who were absent, and did not hear the Reasons, against the Majority of those present, who could only be Judges of what was right and wrong. \*

THIS is Usually, and almost Universally the Case ; what a hopeful *Foundation* is here for *Christians* to build their *Faith* upon ! I dare appeal to any, who know, or have seen the Nature of *Publick Assemblies*, whether this be not a true Representation of them ; and cannot but think it is safer to trust, to the Judgment of three or four Wise, Learned, Good, and Diligent Men, to make a *Summary* of *Christian*

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\* See *Burnet's Reform*. Part 3d p. 303. The Use of Holy Days, turning to the Altar, the Cross in Baptism, kneeling at the Sacrament, Habits, and Organs, were propos'd in Convocation to be taken away, as superstitious : It was carried by a Majority of eight present for the Abolishing them, but when the *Proxies* came to be told, there was a Majority of one for retaining them. This was the same Convocation, that had settled our Articles, a few Days before : It does not appear, how the *Proxies* stood in the Case of the Articles ; but it's plain they were good Votes in any Matter of Faith, or Discipline.

*Doctrine*; than, to any *Council, Synod, Convocation,* or other numerous Assembly.

Y o u have lately seen an *Assembly* of this Nature, met about Matters of less Importance than making *Articles of Faith*; an *Assembly* which, all things consider'd, consisted of as wise and good Men, as other Assemblies usually do. I believe it will be agreed on both Sides, that there was too much Heat, Passion, and Contention among you, to have fixed a *Creed*, or drawn up *Articles of Faith*, which should have been of Weight amongst your People and Followers: and yet you were not the less to be regarded, because some Means, which usually produce Unity in such Assemblies, were wanting.

W H E N such Assemblies come to be represented 200 Years after the Men that compos'd them are Dead, when what they did chiefly appears in *Harmonies of Confessions*, where every Assembly may appear equally venerable, when we have lost the History of the Facts that then appear'd; I say when this is all gone, They may, when there is Occasion for it, be represented as the most Godly, Grave, Learned, Venerable Fathers, void of all the Weaknesses of those who live in our Days, full of the *Holy Ghost*, having nothing but the *Scriptures* before them, searching therein, as if nothing had ever been settled on the Points under Consideration, not following the Examples of, or Copying after others, or taking it for granted they were in the Right, but determining on

a fair Examination, suffering any a fair Hearing who doubted, and at last almost all unanimously, by the clear and plain Light which shone upon them, agreed in the same Things and Words. What a Happiness is it for some Men to have lived a great while ago, and to have their Characters drawn by such hearty Admirers without Memoirs! What a Misfortune to live in our Days, when *Christian Divines* are suppos'd to want the *Primitive Spirit*, as much as the *Primitive Dress*. A *Prophet* has not Honour in his own Country, nor, I may say, in his own time; we have an *Assembly* of this Nature compos'd of many learned and godly Divines, and yet we are allow'd to see their Faults and Weaknesses, nay, even to have some of their Proceedings in Contempt; remove but the Scene as to Time and Place, to *Augsburg*, *Zurich*, or *Charenton*, and then we are not so much as to imagine any of those things we now see. We are to have the most profound Admiration of the Men, and the greatest Deference to their Authority; tho' they were *Enemies* of *Toleration*; tho' some of them made believing *Hebrew Points* to be of *divine Original*, a *Condition* of *Ordination*, and inforc'd equally Points of the greatest Importance, and those of little or none. These Men, who lived so long ago, are to be had in the greatest Veneration, and those of our own Days to be set at nought. I hope after the Character that has been given, that good Man, Mr. *Quick's Synodicon in Gallia Reformata* will be no longer slighted,

slighted, but will be had in great Esteem by all Men of a *Synodical Disposition*. I say not this to derogate from that due Esteem we ought to have for those, who made the first Stand for *Christian Liberty*; but when they are exalted beyond Measure, it is proper to say of them, what they were ready to own of themselves, that they were *fallible*, and of *like* and the *same Passions* with other Men.

Having consider'd these human Articles in their best Light; let us now view them in their worst Character, as they are pretended to be *authoritative Determinations* of the Sense of *Scripture*, and as they are impos'd on *Christians*, with greater or lesser Penalties on those who will not assent to them.

THE Claim of Authority to make Articles of Faith, as it hath been made by the *Church of Rome*, and imitated by some others, is truly and properly usurping the *Prerogative of Christ*; it is Men's taking upon them to declare what shall be necessary to Salvation, which only belongs to him, who has eternal Happiness and Misery at his Disposal: It is taking *Scripture*, the only Rule, out of the Hands of *Christians*, leaving them no Judgment but to choose one Side, leaving them no Appeal but that to our great Lord and Master, which cannot be taken from them.

It is a Mischief which has no End, a Power to make one thing necessary in one Age, and the contrary necessary in another, according to the Turn human Affairs shall take, and according to the

Humour and Interest of those, who for the time being shall have the Power in their Hands. It is confounding a plain Rule, which every one that runs may read, and substituting in the Place of it the obscure *Metaphysical Scholastic* Notions of vain and fallible Men.

THE imposing such human Inventions on *Christians*, is the highest Degree of *spiritual Tyranny*; it has occasion'd all the Heat, Quarrels, and Breaches of Charity, which have been among *Christians*; who might have been as peaceable and quiet in after-times, as they were in the *Apostolical Ages*, if they had had no other Rule but their *Bible*, and if this pernicious Practice of Imposition had not prevailed. This has been the Method by which ambitious and passionate Men have revenged themselves on their fellow *Christians*, who would not pay a blind Deference to their Opinions. It has not been the Importance of the Doctrines to Salvation, or to *christian Duties*, that has made them enacted as Articles; but the Spirit of Opposition, and the Desire of Victory. Every Trifle has been determined and bound down on *Christians*, that there might be no Diversity of Opinions, nor any Pretence left for *Gospel Liberty* against *human Authority*.

THESE have been the *Engines* by which some Men have engross'd the good Things of this World to themselves, and excluded better Men and better *Christians* than themselves from the common Rights of Mankind, and the Benefits of Society

ciety. The Consequence of this has been *Prevarication* and *Hypocrisy*: The Bulk of Mankind will rather *make Shipwreck of a good Conscience*, than of temporal Riches and Happiness; and therefore we see such monstrous Changes backwards and forwards of the same Men in *Church History*, in one Reign all *Orthodox*, in the next the same Men almost as universally *Arians*, in a third about again; till it came to be as common to subscribe a new *Creed* under a new *Council*, as it is for civil Subjects to take Oaths of *Allegiance* to different Governors, as they happen to be won or lost.

MEN were so ready to chop and change, that the great Use and Benefit of these Creeds, [*viz.* getting into the *Church Preferments* of *Non-subscribers*] was almost frustrated; to remedy which Mischief, it was thought proper to ordain that whoever had subscribed the opposite *Creed*, tho' he repented, and was willing to subscribe the true one, should however turn out and be reduced to the State of a *meer Layman*.

By this Means the *Christian Church* was torn in Pieces, and more Damage done to true Religion under the first *Christian Emperors*, than had ever before been, by all the Violence of *Heathen Persecutions*. That this is the Fact, I think all, except the *Church of Rome*, who think *Christianity* was improved the nearer it approached to *Popery*, will own; tho' all perhaps will not agree, that making *human Tests of Faith*, was the Occasion of this Mischief. As to those who may have a great Veneration for Men, whose History they are un-

acquainted with, and a great Zeal for what they have little Knowledge of ; I would recommend to them the Reading the *Ecclesiastical Histories* of *Socrates* and *Zozomen*, which the *English Reader* may be easily supply'd with. These *Historians* relate what pass'd in the *Council of Nice*, and the *Age* after it. They were both of them *Orthodox*, one of them a *Dissenter*, and what approaches nearest to an *English Puritan* : none need fear reading them, they were as sound in the Faith, and their Zeal as great as can be wish'd. After this Story has been inspected, I dare trust the Judgment of any sensible Reader, as to the Point of making, and imposing *human Creeds*. Here you have fourteen or fifteen work'd up to the greatest Nicety, with half a Score *Anathema's* at the Tail of some of them. Mysterious Truths still more darkned, contradictory Propositions reconciled, silly Applications of *Scripture* made Proofs of Fundamentals, new fangled Phrases and *Philosophical Words* found out to explain what was suppos'd the *Holy Ghost* in *Scripture* had not so well express'd. In short no Case of human Law is so nice and difficult, as it was according to these *Creeds* to judge who was a *Christian*. The Makers of them were as unmerciful in their Imposition, as they had been stupid and ridiculous in their Composition. Deposing of *Bishops*, Tumults, Rebellions, Massacres, Murders, were the immediate Consequences of this mending the Faith. Such a black Scene opens upon it, as would make every *Christian Heart* tremble,

tremble, and every honest Man afraid, at the most remote Appearance of any thing like it. The good Man *Socrates*, whom I have mentioned, concludes his *History* of such dismal Events, with this pious Wish. *That the Church may enjoy a profound Peace, that those who come after him, may have no Materials for Church History; as he should have had none, if those who had raised such Contests, and Differences had been of a peaceable Disposition.*

THE Emperor *Constantine* seems, at the first breaking out of these Disputes, to have taken the proper Course; which if he had persevered in, would have probably prevented all the Mischiefs that soon followed. His first Letter to *Alexander* and *Arius* contains the most Prudent, and *Christian* Advice, that can be given, and as it was proper then, is no less proper to be read, on every like Occasion.

HOWEVER *Christians* were too warm, to bear those healing Methods: They thought *Controversies* of Faith, were as proper to be *Adjudged* and *Settled*, as *Quarrels* about *Property*; and that one was as much for the Benefit of *Christianity*, as the other of *Human Society*. Accordingly they made the first Essay, at the *Council of Nice*. The very *Pinch* of their *Creed*, was a Humane obscure Word of doubtful Signification, which they had not thought of, had not their Adversaries furnished them with it, by telling them they scrupled that Word above all others; for which reason they insisted on it, rather than any other. This  
notable

notable Piece of Prudence, has since been very often imitated. The hardest and most offensive Expressions have been used, for fear those who were to be tried by them, should be able to swallow the *Test*, and keep their *Living*s. You have reason to remember an Instance of this sort, when it was not thought sufficient, to mix the *Test* with all the bitter Ingredients, that could be thought of; but for fear of Compliance, it was to be taken without seeing, or knowing, what were the Contents of it. This answered the End, and produced a greater Number of *Non-compliers*, than was ever before known, on the like Occasion; and yet not near so many, as considering the Case might have been reasonably expected. Whoever observes the very small Number, that turn'd out in the three *Revolutions*, at the Beginning of the *Reformation* here (which was a Change almost as great, as between *Christianity* and *Paganism*) will Honour your *Predecessors*, will see how Admirably the Petition, *lead us not into Temptation*, is fitted for Humane frailty, and will have a just Abhorrence of those, who unnecessarily lay a Temptation before any to prevaricate with *God* and their Consciences.

I presume it will now be said, what need of all this long and terrible Preamble, truly, I hope, by your Conduct, you will make it not so pertinent to the present Case, as otherwise it might be. However that may fall out, it cannot be useless, to put Christians in Mind, of what has been the

the Cause of the greatest Mischief to true and unfeigned Religion ; and some good Mens Heads are so oddly turn'd, as to need a great deal to be said to waken their Drowsiness, and make them listen to some Truths which, tho' of the greatest Importance, they are often apt to forget.

WHAT I have said is, I think, a sufficient Foundation for what I shall now infer, as to the Regard Dissenters from an Establish'd Church ought to shew to Human *Articles of Faith*, as they are usually called.

I.) As to any *proper Authority* in the Compilers of them, so as to make them any way binding on *Christians*, *Dissenters* ought above all Men to deny and reject any such Pretences: For if any Men have Authority in Controversies of Faith, in which the Consciences of Christians are so much concern'd, surely they will have Authority sufficient to determine Matters of less Moment, *Ceremonies* and outward Observances, which cannot be objected against as really sinful, but are chiefly opposed, as being *Impositions* on *Christian Liberty*, without competent Authority ; to admit Authority in one Case, and deny it in the other, would be ridiculous and absurd. You are allowed therefore to disclaim both, by being excused subscribing Part of the 20th Article. (*The Church hath Power to decree Rights and Ceremonies, and Authority in Matters of Faith,*) which might have the Appearance of claiming this Power at first Sight, tho' in the other Part of the Article

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the Church disclaims it, and builds all on Scripture.

2) CONSIDERING the Principles of *Dissenters*, which I have, I hope, truly stated before, considering the Mischief such Articles have done to the Christian World, considering the Claim is still kept up by some Men, of making and Imposing them ; Dissenters ought to avoid paying *unnecessarily*, any *voluntary* and *publick* Regard to any of them, though the truest and best amongst them. Such Countenance shewn to them, is an implicit Assent, not only to the Truth of them, but to their Usefulness for the End for which they were intended, *viz.* to be Rules and Tests. It is a tacit Approbation of those Men's Conduct who made them, and an Encouragement for others hereafter to proceed farther herein, as they shall see Occasion. It will be but a poor and useless Shift, to say we approve of what you have done well of this Sort ; but if you go on any further, than what we judge right, you are highly blameable. Those who have Power in their Hands are to use their own Judgments, as to the exercise of it : They will always judge what they do is right, it is in vain to oppose that Power in particular Instances, the only Way to support your Liberty, is to oppose it under all, even the best Colours, that you may not feel the Weight of it under the Worst.

3). DISSENTERS ought to make use of no such Engines to Torture, Oppress, or Injure one another,

ther, either directly or indirectly, this is shamefully abandoning the Rule, by which alone they are to judge, the Scriptures; which give no Countenance to any Hardship of this sort: If they will fight with such Human Weapons, who can pity them, if they fall under the Hands of those, who are much abler and stronger at this sort of Combat.

I proceed now, *Reverend Gentlemen*, to consider your Conduct in this Affair. You have paid a very *publick* and singular Regard to certain *Human Forms* of *sound Words*, by subscribing your Names, and declaring your Assent and Consent to them. You are so far hitherto from owning that this was either improper or unnecessary, that you have rather chosen to separate from the Assembly of your fellow Ministers, than to drop such your Subscription; you seem so entirely to approve of what you have done, that your *Paper* has, till very lately, been daily offer'd for the Subscription of those, who are willing to list under your Banner.

I need not apply personally to you, what I have said in general already, as to the Propriety or Usefulness of such Forms, and the Regard due to them: If what I have said is reasonable, the Application will be easily and justly made to this Case, or any other of the same Nature; what I may farther offer will fall more naturally in, when I come to consider the Reasons

which you have given, or probably may give for your *Conduct*.

THE Consequence of your Subscription has been this, your *Brethren*, who did not think fit to Subscribe your Paper, have been suspected and charged, as Enemies to the Truths contained in it: Their Characters and Reputations have been aspersed and blackn'd by many zealous and ignorant Persons (for from those of more Charity and Knowledge they have nothing to fear) this you are suppos'd to have known and heard, and hitherto have sat still, without contributing to the Remedy of such Abuses. You have not in any publick Manner disavow'd the Actions of those, who make your Conduct a Pretence to asperse your Brethren; as if this was a Matter that did not at all concern you, how can you help it if People will be foolish, and misapply to ill Purposes, what you meant honestly and for good Purposes. This is the Excuse some will make for you, who think your Silence on this Occasion needs any. I am persuaded you yourselves are too much acquainted with your *Duty*, as *Christians*, with the Nature of your *Character* as *Ministers*, to make any such Apology. You are too sincere, too open hearted, to play such a poor wordly politick Part, in a Matter in which Religion is concerned. You will not suffer any unjust Imputation on your Brethren, when it is so easily in your Power to prevent it. You will either think it your *Duty* openly to avow the Charge,

Charge, or Suspicion against them, if you think it just; or if you think it not so, will disavow those, who take occasion from your Actions to injure your *Brethren*.

I cannot but hope therefore, that you will without delay, make a full *Declaration* of your Charity for your *Brethren*, of your good Opinion of them, that you will disclaim and discourage all those, who shall attempt to injure them in their dearest Interests.

SUCH a *Declaration* will make, what I am now going to add, so far from being a Reflection on you, that it will rather be an Encomium; when it shall appear to all the World, that you abhor every Thing, that has the Appearance of Imposition and Persecution. I shall not therefore neglect considering what will be the Case, on the Supposition that you suffer this Affair to go on in the Way it is in at present, of uncharitable Reflections and Defamation. This Conduct, I say, will be as much Imposition and Persecution, as *Dissenters* are capable of. They have not the Sword of the Magistrate to execute their Wrath on those who oppose them, they cannot imprison, sequester, or inflict corporal Punishments, they have no Weapons but those of every private Subject, their Resentment can work no other way than by Words, and those Actions which are in every private Man's Power. They may indeed raise false Reports and Scandals, they may represent their Ministers and fellow *Christians*

*stians* as *Heterodox* and *Heretical*, and by that means ruin their good Names, and hinder them from being useful in their Stations; they may withdraw from their Ministers, withhold their Subscriptions to their Maintenance, and prevail on others to do the like; and by this Way remove them from their Work, and turn them to the wide World to seek a Subsistence; and all this without any reasonable Cause. Is not this Persecution? Is not this all they are able to do? And would not Men of this Temper do every Thing else, did the Times so favour them, as to put it in their Power? It may be said all this may be avoided if they will but Subscribe some *Human Forms*, the Contents of which they believe to be very true. But does not this amount to an Imposition of those Forms, is it not compelling Assent to them by the most forcible way that in this Case can be us'd, and is the Fault of the Imposers less, because those they have to do with, happen really to be of their Opinion?

CAN there be no *Conscience* in opposing *Human Forms*, tho' they happen to be true ones, when under that Pretence so many false Ones have been obtruded on *Christians*? Shall any be us'd ill for having better Eyes than their Neighbours, and seeing more remote and probable Dangers to *Christian Liberty*? Shall a Desire to settle Religion on its true Basis, to have *Scripture* the only Rule to be appeal'd to, the only Guide and Decider of Controversies, shall this expose any  
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amongst *Protestant Dissenters* to the Resentment and Anger of their Brethren? Shall they approve and applaud those Hero's in the Establish'd Church who, under great Discouragements, are pleading this Cause on their behalf; and at the same time disapprove and injure those, who are pursuing the same End among themselves? They surely will not fall under the just Reflection, they have made on the Conduct of others, by approving what makes for them against those that are stronger than themselves, and disapproving the same Things when urged by those who are in their Power.

I shall now proceed to consider some Reasons which have been given either for your Conduct or against that of your *Non-subscribing Brethren*.

1.) *Every one ought to be ready to give an Account of the Faith that is in him.* This is very true, but is a Form compos'd by other Men the only, or the best Way of giving such an Account: Indeed if a Number of Men are to publish their Faith to the World, as it were by Proclamation, that it may be known unto all Men how *Orthodox* they are, such a Form is very usefull; it will serve for a Standard for those to resort to, who are willing to engage in a Spiritual War under certain Leaders; but as to any of the good and peaceable Purposes of *Christians*, such Forms seem to be altogether improper.

*Christians* are not only to judge for themselves what is the true Faith, and the Doctrine of Scripture;  
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ture ; but on proper Occasions are likewise to give a Reason for their Faith, and are entitled to know the Faith of their Brethren, in Matters of the greatest Importance, and on which the Title to Communion depends. But is recurring to a human *Creed* or *Article* the proper Way of giving an Account of the Faith that is in them ? This is indeed a fine compendious Way to save some Men the Trouble of searching the *Scriptures*, and to enable them to condemn others, who are ready to give a Reason from thence of the *Hope that is in them*, without the Trouble of going to the *infallible Rule*. Learned Men may write Books, and amuse themselves with proving Doctrines out of the *Bible* ; but when *Christian Societies* come to judge who they shall hold *communion* with, and whom they shall treat with Love and Charity as their Brethren, then the *Bible* is thrown aside, and the Matter determin'd by this *short Issue*, will you give Assent and Consent to this Form which we, or some other Men, have compos'd, if not *we have no more to say to you*. This has been too often the Case, and you have seen a late Instance of it, which those concern'd are pleas'd to found on *your Advice* : If this be what you approve of, your Brethren may easily see what will be the Drift of your Conduct, if it be not approved, I hope you will not suffer it to pass with your Sanction as a Precedent for the like Conduct in other Places.

H A s all your Preaching and Instruction been in vain, has the glorious Light of the *Gospel* shone so brightly amongst us, as we daily hear from your Pulpits, and are *Christians* at this Time of Day not able to judge of, and prove the very *Foundations* of their Faith out of *Scripture*, but must on every Occasion call for help from *human Articles* ? Shall *Christians* be inflam'd with so much Zeal, as to exclude others, tho' to all Appearance pious and good Men, from their *Communion*, and at the same time have so little Knowledge of the Word of *God*, be so little mighty in the *Scriptures*, as not to venture arguing from thence on the *Essentials* of their Religion ; but intrench themselves in the impregnable Fortrefs of a human *Creed*, and from thence annoy those who are in the open Field of the *Gospel* ? It may be said this is an open Field indeed, inhabited by *Out-Laws*, *Maroders*, and *Banditti*, who lead honest People out of their Way into By-Paths, and there murder them : But are they therefore to be hang'd up at the next Tree, are they not to have a fair Tryal, the Fact to be prov'd and Sentence given against them according to the Laws of their Country, and not by *spurious Laws* of no Authority ? But to leave Similitudes which generally serve more for Amusement than Instruction : It cannot be deny'd that *Christians* have a Right to reject from their Communion those, who by their *Tenets* or *Actions* have excluded themselves from the *Body*, of which *Christ* is the *Head* ; but none sure-

ly ought to be excluded the *Church on Earth*, who according to the Terms of the *Gospel*, are in the Way of Salvation, and are consequently likely to be Members of the *Church Triumphant in Heaven*. What a dreadful Sentence is this, for some *Christians* to pronounce against others, who lay claim to that Name ; that they are out of the Way of Salvation, and the ordinary Means of Grace, and are left to that uncovenanted Mercy of God, which some charitable People may allow to extend to *Turks, Jews, and Infidels*. A Judgment of this Nature, ought never to be pass'd without the fullest Examination imaginable, hearing all that the accused Person can urge, endeavouring to convince him from *Scripture*, shewing him plain and express Authority there against his Error ; and if after such an Examination any can, with a safe and clear Conscience, say this Man is not in the Way, which *Scripture* has declared necessary to Salvation, let them exclude him. But what a wide Difference is there between this Way of proceeding, and passing such a Judgment on the refusal to Assent to a *Human Form*, of no Authority. This Way of reasoning, I know is proper only to those, who conceive that there is a *Catholick Church*, according to the *Creed* called the *Apostles*, and that a regular Exclusion from one part of it, excludes a Man from being a Member of the whole.

THOSE who carry their Notion no farther, than to small and particular Societies, have some  
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Colour to tie up their Members to more Nicety and to Agreement in Matters of small Importance. Their excluding any from their particular Church, leaves them still an allowed Liberty and Claim to be of any other Communion. They need form no Judgment, whether such a particular Notion is inconsistent with being a *Christian*; but only that such a one's Company is not agreeable to them: And were their Exclusions never followed with uncharitable Censures, and Injuries to the Persons of the Excluded, I should think there was no fault to be found with them, but that they might, without Offence, enjoy their Fancy of having to do only with those, who are altogether of their Mind.

2). ANOTHER thing urg'd in your Defence is this. We have all of us already given our Assent to this Human Form, and why may we not do it again now; unless we have alter'd our Minds, and disbelieve now, what we formerly sincerely assented to.

THE Legislature makes *subscribing the Articles a necessary Condition* of the Liberty you have of publick Worship, and of exercising your Ministry; you have devoted your selves to that Work, and would therefore be highly to blame if you should neglect it, because a Condition is required, which you can and may lawfully comply with. But surely it does not follow from hence, that you must account it a great Priviledge to have these Terms laid on you, I believe it has not generally been thought so by you. Must  
you

You therefore be very forward and ready on every Occasion, to give your Assent and Consent to such Forms, when none calls on you to do it, when it can do no real Service to Truth, which is supported by Arguments and not by Votes; but may be of great Prejudice to Charity, by so publick an Alarm, which immediately sets fire to Men's Passions, raises their Resentment, and produces a Zeal that is not easily to be lead and govern'd by Reason. I believe I may venture to say, without being contradicted by you, or any who know them, that your *Brethren*, from whom you have withdrawn on this Occasion, are almost to a Man of those Sentiments, which you will own to be Sound in the Doctrine of the *Deity* of our Lord *Jesus Christ*. That they have not alter'd their Minds as to the Doctrine it self, since their former Subscription; though they may have alter'd their Sentiments, concerning the Expediency of such *Tests*. I believe they will think it sufficient to give a just and full Satisfaction to all good *Christians*, whom it may concern, of the Soundness of their Faith, in a Method much more proper, than that you have taken; and will not, thro' fear of displeasing warm Men, abandon the Defence of what they think so good a Cause, the just Liberty of *Christians*, and the Sufficiency of *Scripture* to guide and direct their Faith and Practice.

3). THE Form we have Signed, is a Form of *sound Words*, it contains not only Truth, but  
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Truth of the greatest Importance, the very Foundations of the *Christian* Faith; and therefore ought to be assented to by all good *Christians*.

It will, I believe, be allowed that Christians may hold these Truths fully, tho' they had never heard of this Form of expressing them; that they may be earnest for these Truths, and yet cautious how they maintain them by the same Methods, which will equally support Error, viz. a Deference to Human Judgment and Authority; that they may, without either being thought humerfome or obstinate, think the *Scriptures* the best Rule for expressing these Truths, as they are allow'd to be the only one, by which they learn them. Neither the Truths themselves, nor the Importance of them is the Subject of this Debate; nor do those who adhere to that Cause, I am defending, dispute either the one or the other; and I hope, no impartial Person will think those Truths any part of this Debate, Tho' I perceive some Men will be continually suggesting, that they are. Such Suggestions may inflame the Zeal of well meaning Persons, make them dread hearing any thing said, that has even the most remote Relation to those Points, unless it comes from those, who express a more than ordinary Concern for them; they will fear some lurking Poison under Exhortains to these "*Beautiful Virtues, Charity, Modesty, and mutual Forbearance*"

"*bearance*, and will arm their good and tender  
 "Hearts against the Infection. \*

THAT I may not prejudice the good Cause I am defending, by leaving room for unjust Suggestions, I think it proper here to declare; that tho' my tender Heart may retain some Charity for their Persons, I have no Inclination to defend the Cause of *Arians*. I conceive the Proper Unity of the Supreme Being to be the great Principle of Natural Religion, which cannot be inconsistent with revealed. I believe the Divine Nature of *Jesus Christ* to be that of the Supreme God. I believe that great Mystery of Godliness, *God manifested in the Flesh*, and am little concern'd about some other Mysteries, which to me seem to have more of the Hand of Men, than God in them. I have but one Object of Worship, and cannot fall into the Notions of those, who assert either three equal Beings, or three Beings Subordinate to each other, as the Objects of Worship.

I approve of your Design, learned Gentlemen, to support from Scripture Evidence, the great Doctrine of the Unity of the Divine Essence; I and every one, ought to commend that Way of defending Truth against Error, tho' we should not Admire all you have said on that Occasion, and tho' at the same time we should oppose you in some other Methods of supporting Truth, which we think are not the proper ones, but

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\* *Doctrine of Trinity*, pag. 3.

may equally, as the Case shall happen, serve to support Error. While I am Addressing my self to you, Gentlemen, upon a Subject that has some relation to the Truth you have so lately defended, as it has to all other Gospel Truths, it will not be improper to shew some Regard to your Performance, as far as I can do it without leaving my main Subject.

“ Y o u have reprov’d those, *who will by all Means find out the Almighty unto Perfection, that need not that he should teach them how to speak concerning him.* \* This I own is a just Reproof, and express’d with more Moderation, than Men of that Character, if any such there are, deserve. I dare say, however, that you did not intend thereby to Discourage any inquisitive *Christian*, from using all the Helps and Assistance, which his Natural Reason and Sagacity could supply him with, towards understanding the Doctrine of *Scripture*: This, you seem to me, to have done your selves, and this every one must do, who will explain *Scripture*, or express the Sense of it in other Words, than are there used. I cannot think you design’d to discountenance a just and modest Use of Human Reason in this Enquiry, or that you claimed a Liberty to use your own Reason, and at the same time intended to disparage and depreciate that of others; tho’ I fear some Persons may be lead by your

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\* *Doctrine of Trinity.* pag. 17.

expressions to be very fearful of any Reasoning, but what comes from your selves. Tho' I agree with you that Men will never "*find out the Almighty to Perfection,*" that the *Mysteries of Revelation* will still remain *Mysteries*, after all our Pains and Inquiries; yet I would not have them made more dark than they are left in the *Scriptures*; nor any of the plain and obvious Dictates of Reason disregarded, because they may tend in some Measure to dissipate that Darkness, which Men have made. Give me leave therefore to suggest to you some thoughts, which appear to me exceeding plain, I speak for my self, leaving others full Liberty to judge, whether they are as plain to them or not.

1.) Our Belief of, or Assent to, any Proposition, either divine, or human, is no larger than the Sense or Ideas we affix to that Proposition; if there be any Part of it, or any Word of it, to which we have no Idea or Meaning, we do not Assent to that Part or Word; if our Ideas are imperfect or obscure, our Assent is so equally, and in the same Degree.

2.) The Assent we give to the Words of *God*, the Meaning of which we do not understand, is only this; that these are his Words who is Truth it self, that they contain Truth in them, but what that Truth is we know not; but this is not assenting to the Proposition contained in those Words, which we do not understand; but to another general Proposition, which we do fully understand,  
viz.

*viz.* That God always speaks Truth, To say that we believe a Proposition, which we do not understand, is a Contradiction in Terms, and yet, I am ashamed to say it, it requires some Pains to bring Men out of such an Absurdity.\*

3.) Tho' we have a Veneration for the Words of God, which we do not understand at all, or but in Part; yet no such Veneration is due to the Words of Men, if they propose their expressions for the Assent of others; they ought fully to explain what they mean by their own Words. Can there be a greater Folly in Nature than this is, for Men to say, the Words and Expressions of God, concerning his own Nature, are Difficult and Obscure, we cannot frame adequate Ideas of them; but yet we will explain them, and express the Meaning of them in Words of our own, which God has not used; and to these Words of our own, we have neither a certain Meaning our selves, nor will we explain them to others,

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\* See the Doctrine of the Trinity pag. 136.

*Men ought not to think it a hard Matter for God who is incomprehensible in his Nature, to propose such things for the Object of their Faith, which are incomprehensible to their Understanding, thereby to try their Faith and Obedience. This Text wants a Comment, I fear you may here have Occasion for that notable Rule, you are pleas'd page 40. to put into the Mouth of Socinus. [That any, the greatest Force is to be used with Words, rather than take them in their obvious Meaning] for the obvious Meaning of these Words is, that our Faith or Assent may be larger than our Ideas, Meaning, or Understanding; and the Meaning I have mention'd [that God's Words are true, tho' we do not understand them] is a great Force put on them; for surely believing that God speaks Truth, is no great Tryal of Faith or Obedience.*

who are to assent to them ? This is a Pretence of the most arrogant Nature, which Men of Piety or common Sense, ought to oppose with Zeal ; this is not leaving *Mysteries* in the Concealment, which the *Holy Ghost* has left them in, but casting a *Human Vail* over them, to obscure them still more.

GIVE me leave now to apply this to the *Forms* you have Sign'd, and the *Book* you have written, in which the Word *Person* is used in expressing the great Mystery you defend : This is certainly a Human Word, as it is used on this Occasion ; if it be ever used in *Scripture*, as when it is said that *Christ is the express Image of his Father's Person*, it there stands for *Substance* or *Being*, which is a Sense you would not have it by any means taken in, as it stands in your Book, and have indeed disclaim'd it. The *Apostle's Creed*, the *Nicene*, and all other *Creeds*, till that which goes under the Name of *St. Athanasius*, could Express the Faith contended for, without the help of this Word ; so that it may truly be said this is a Human Word, as it stands in these Forms, and but late introduc'd into the Confessions of Faith. We read much in *Scripture* concerning the *Father* the *Son* and the *Holy Ghost*, and likewise that *God is one* : but we no where find it said that there are *three Persons* and *one Godhead*, this is not the Language of the *Holy Ghost* but of Men ; it does not follow from thence, that it is not true, but this follows, that if Men will use Words of their own  
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in Matters of Faith, they are to explain the Meaning of them, at least if they require Assent to them ; otherwise they must admit that any other Words, that had no Meaning, would be as proper in the Place of them ; for a Word, to which, in the Place where it stands, there is no Idea affix'd, is certainly a bare Sound. I think therefore that the Meaning of such a Word may, without Presumption, be asked of those who use it. If the Word *Person* be consider'd in its Original and first Use, it signifies a *Character*, being derived from the Masks those put on, who acted on the Theater, which were call'd *Personæ* ; which were suited to the Part to be acted ; in this Sense one Man might have sometimes one Character, sometimes another, and so be a different *Person* at different Times. The same Original likewise accounts for a second Sense of the Word, as it means an individual distinct Being ; so several Actors, Acting several Parts, were call'd distinct Persons : And this is the Sense, in which we now use the Word *Person*, upon all other Occasions, but in our Professions of Faith. This being then a Humane Word, and consequently a Word, whose meaning ought to be explain'd ; let us consider what Meaning it can have in the Place where it stands ? If it be understood to mean an individual, distinct, or numerical Being, which is the Common Sense of it, then the Doctrine of your Article will be, what you abhor, *Tritheism* ; and the Doctrine of

Unity will only consist, in being of one Substance or Nature, as three Men are of the same Common Human Substance and Nature : This seems to have been the Opinion of some *great Men* in this Nation, and many have thought this the Opinion of the great *Athanasius* and the Sense of the Council of *Nice* : \* At least it may be said of almost all the Human Forms, where the Words the *same Substance* are used to denote the

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\* Epiphanius adv. Hæreses Edit. Paris. *Epiphanius* was a mortal Enemy to all Heresies and Hereticks, and a profess'd Defender of the Doctrine of the Council of *Nice*. He p. 609. blaming *Paulus Samosatenus* and his Followers, says, They make God with his Word one Person, as one Man with his Word [or Reason]; this he Argues against, alledging, that *Christ* is said in *St. John's Gospel* to be God, with God, but adds he, the Word or reason of Man is not Man with Man. p. 750. Every thing begets its own Likeness, Man begets a Man, and God a God. p. 615. The Nature of the Son is the Image or Copy of the Father, and like it in all respects.

The Son is not the same Numerical Substance with the Father, but Consubstantial, for this Expression Consubstantial does not signify One [Individual] Being. p. 749. This Expression *we are one*, does not signify one Numerical Being, for *Christ* therefore says, *are one*, not *am One*; because the Father and Son are two Compleat distinct Beings, p. 884. there is no Pretence for quarrelling with those, who use the Word *Consubstantial*, as if it imply'd a Confusion in the Divinity, for this very Word implies two Beings. pag. 797. The Word *Con*. does not signify One Individual, for *Consubstantial* Signifies two entire distinct Beings, but not different or unlike one another.

Page 515. There is one Divinity, one Dominion, one Ascription of Glory; but a *Trinity* in Number not as one thing call'd by three Names, but truly distinct Names distinct Subsistences, p. 871. We conceive of the Son as God, like the Father in respect of his Nature. Men make Statues of Gold, of Silver, and other Metals that are like their Originals but not *Consubstantial*, p. 743. The *Arians* affirm the Son to be something Foreign, and of a Different kind from the Nature, and Essence of the Father.

Page 797. After endeavouring to prove that the Word *Consubstantial* is warranted by Scripture, he adds. But why may we not use such an Expression [supposing it to be Unscriptural] for the sake of Piety and Union in Truth? for without the Word *Consubstantial* there could be no Discovery or Conviction of Heresies, for as a Serpent hates the smell of Bitumen [or as the Moderns say, as the Devil hates Primstone] so *Arius* and *Sabellius* hate the Word *Consubstantial*.

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*Unity*, and the Word *Person*, the *Trinity*; that they are capable of having that Sense put on them fairly at least, if not with more Probability than any other; tho' I will not say that was the Meaning of the Compilers, who I apprehend had almost none, or a very dark and obscure Meaning to their own Words.

THE other Sense of the Word, as it stands for a *Character*, an *Office*, a *Relation*, or a *Mode of Existence*, as some have express'd themselves, will indeed support the Doctrine of the proper Unity of the supreme Being; and will represent him to us under different Characters and Manifestations, as the Author and Preserver of all Things, as united to the human Nature of *Christ* for the great End of saving the World, and as sanctifying the Hearts of *Christians*, and leading them into all Truth; and tho' this Distinction be not a mere Name, yet it will still have, as you express it, \* the hard Name of *Sabellianism* put upon it. What therefore shall honest plain *Christians* do in this Case, to understand this human Word; when such hard Names are to be given to them, if they take it in either of the obvious Senses of it? Why surely they may ask those who use this Word, and expect they should do so too, for a third Meaning; and if that cannot be given, humbly beg leave to have no Meaning at all to the Word. I am unwilling *Gentlemen* to ask you to explain this Word, and give us a Meaning, in which we may safely understand it; and cannot but think you would

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\* *Doctrins of Trinity*, page 21.

rather dispense with using that Word, than attempt it : unless your Readers shall be contented with *Melancthon's* Definition in the *Augsburgh* Confession, that the Word *Person* signifies *not a Part or Quality in another, but what properly subsists* ; these Words, if they have any Meaning, seem to favour strong of *Tritheism*.

I imagine you will not think it proper to explain the *Problem* of a *Learned Divine*, now a *Dignitary* of the *Church*, that this Word stands for a *Distinction that is somewhat greater than a modal Distinction, and less than a real*. For my Part I cannot, at present, form in my Mind any Conception of a Middle betwixt these two, I have not the least Shadow or Glimpse of an Idea to this Proposition ; if any other Person can form such a Conception, or have a Meaning to such Words, I should be glad they would communicate it ; If they have not I hope the World will not be disquieted about them : but they will be suffer'd to pass as mere Sounds, in the same Class as *substantial Forms*, and many other *Scholastic Terms* ; which formerly puzzled the Brains of curious Men, but are now at rest, buried in Oblivion.

I hope, what I have said will not be thought being *Wise* above what *God has written*, tho' it may be thought boldness to find fault with what some *Men* have *Written*. I cannot but think, *plain* and good Christians may form as just Notions of the *Father, Son, and Spirit*, consistently

sistently with the Unity of the supreme Being, by reading the *Scriptures*; as by the help of such Words in *Confessions* and *Articles*. The Depth of this great Mystery will then remain the same, in which the *Holy Ghost* has left it, and it will not have a new or greater Darkness put upon it, by Human Words, without Knowledge. I must do you the justice Gentlemen, to say, that you have been very sparing in the Use of the Word *Person* in your Performance, and seem rather therein to have comply'd with Custom, than to have laid any great Stress on it. If I can judge any thing from the general Complexion of your Treatise, you would not reject from your Communion, any plain and scrupulous *Christian*, who should make a Difficulty of using this Word in Confessing his Faith. I have some doubt whether, in that Place, p. 21. where you say the Distinction in the Trinity is not a *meer Name*, if the Word *Character*, *Relation*, *Manifestation*, or some other Word of that Import, had been used instead of *mere Name*, you would have given it the *hard Name* of *Sabellianism*. I likewise doubt in p. 117. where you Condemn those, that conceive the Distinction to be a threefold *Habitude* or *Consideration* of the *one Person* of the *Father*, whether if instead of the Words, the *one Person* of the *Father*, these Words had been placed the *one Supreme God*, you would have condemn'd such Expressions. I can not but think you would bear with one, who should hold the Unity of  
*God,*

God, and the proper and Eternal Deity of the Son, and Holy Spirit, in Opposition to Socinus; tho' the World should give such a one the *hard Name* of a *Sabellian*. Such hard Names of *Sabellius*, *Athanasius*, *Pelagius*, *Calvin*, *Luther*, *Zuinglius*, *Arminius*, and an hundred more, have too much frightned the World, such Names have nothing to do with Truth, and ought neither to influence, nor prejudice any in their searches after it. To conclude this Point if the Case of this Word *Person* be as I have represented it, surely a good *Christian* might, even on that Account, be a little *Scrupulous* how he set his Name to such Words, without a Proper call to it; when there is a just and urgent Necessity for it, I allow a good Man might, without Offence, sign such a Form; for if some of the Words are suppos'd to have no meaning at all, they certainly can have no *Heretical* meaning.

I need not repeat what I have said on the Word *Person*, and apply it to the other Word *one Substance*, the Case is the same as to that Word, of a double Signification, which a *Sabellian*, and *Tritheist* may each take in their own Way. I could have wish'd you had been somewhat more explicit in your meaning of such Human Words, your *Zeal* would then have become you somewhat better when your Readers might have known by your Book, what were your real Sentiments, and what you would have them defend

send and adhere to. I wish we could all agree either to keep close to what the *Scriptures* have said, or if we will use *Human Words* and *Technical Phrases*, tell what we mean by them, be open and candid, not play with Words, but tell our Minds freely ; and if we hold what we think is right, never be afraid of owning it, tho' the World should give us *hard Names*.

THE World will always have such a Regard for Men of Uprightness and Learning, as to presume that they really have a Meaning to *Human Forms*, which they Subscribe, and for which they shew a great Fondness. Why should not such, therefore be ready to declare, and own that Meaning ? Is it because having any Meaning to *certain Words* is dangerous, and will have some *old hard Name* or other put upon it ? Such *Names* are *Bugbears*, which ought not to frighten Men of Courage and Integrity. What if some weak and silly People should have a great deal of Zeal, for what they fondly conceive to be *Orthodoxy*, and should place it in a dark and profound Veneration for *certain Human Words* ; which they imagine they believe, tho' they own they do not understand them ? Surely there is common Sense enough left in the World, to defend wise and good Men against such ignorant Zeal ? Can it be a difficult Thing to convince Men, that it is an Absurdity to affirm, *that two Propositions, conceived in different Words, are the same ; when one of the Propositions, or it may be both of them are*

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not understood? Or to express it plainer, *That certain Human Words, to which we have no Idea's, are equivalent to, and contain the same Sense, as certain Divine Words, which we do not perfectly understand.* Should not all wise and good *Christians* join together in detecting, and opposing such Darkness and Ignorance, and agree, either to speak plain, and tell what they mean by *certain Words* of their own, without fearing Danger; or else drop those Words, and leave *Christians* to have a Veneration for the Words of God alone, which are certainly true, whether we understand them or not.

GIVE me leave, *Reverend Gentlemen*, to make some farther general Observations on your Book.

YOUR proving from *Scripture* the great Doctrines you are defending, none can find fault with; every one must approve of that way of arguing, which is the only proper one to support those great Truths: But might not this have been done with effect, without sounding such an *Alarm*, as you have done, as if there was danger of a great and general *Apostacy* amongst your *Brethren*. You say, "that this [*viz. Arianism*] is the Trial " of our present Day, is too true to be denied, " and too manifest to be any longer concealed by " us. That you cannot stand by, and see your " Brethren, Friends, and Relations both in natural, and spiritual Bonds, turn out of the Way " of Knowledge, and draw others along with " them into their unhappy Wandrings.

" YOU

“ You speak of your Friends and Brethren,  
 “ *p.* 12. who are changing their Principles, who  
 “ are on the other Side. You speak of the Dan-  
 “ ger, *p.* 13. of turning your religious Assemblies,  
 “ into Sacrilegious Confederacies against the  
 “ one living and true God. Of those, who are  
 “ yet called *Christians*, being divided about the  
 “ Object of Divine Worship. The Confusion  
 “ and Jealousies there must needs be amongst  
 “ the Worshippers, each *Party* being afraid, lest  
 “ they should have fellowship with Idols ; so that  
 “ it will be hardly possible for them to worship  
 “ God, together in the same Places, with a  
 “ good Conscience. *Pag.* 14. When the Godhead  
 “ of *Christ* and the *Holy Ghost* are call’d in Que-  
 “ stion ; we think we are call’d up to defend  
 “ them. *Pag.* 15. If it shall please our Glorious  
 “ Redeemer, for promoting his own Honour,  
 “ and preserving the precious Interests of Peace  
 “ and Truth amongst us. *Pag.* 147. You speak of  
 “ the Brethren *here*, that incline to favour the  
 “ *new Scheme*, and *pag.* 148. that they have de-  
 “ parted from the receiv’d Doctrine, they have  
 “ distracted the Minds of poor People, they have  
 “ disturbed the quiet of our Churches, and what  
 “ we have done has been only in necessary Defence  
 “ of our selves, and the most important Truths  
 “ of our Salvation ; nor this till we found them  
 “ many Ways invaded.” With a great deal  
 more of the same Nature in that pious, and ex-  
 cellent Exhortation at the Close of your Work ;

which in the main contains such Things, as all good *Christians* ought readily to hear.

WOULD not any one think by these Expressions, that we were in a most dreadful Case, that great Numbers had embrac'd already wrong Notions of the Divine Nature, that others were wavering, and on the Precipice ready to change their Principles, and revolt to the Enemies of our *Saviour's Divinity*; that the Danger was so great, as to call on us all to look about us with fear on every Side? You know best what private Reasons you might have for such a Representation of the Case; all that appears publickly, that may be thought to tend this Way, is much less, than you seem to desire the World should apprehend. The Case of *Exeter* is what makes the greatest Noise, and yet in that Case it is own'd, that the ejected Ministers had neither preach'd nor propagated any Heretical Opinions: They are indeed charged as not having defended the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, when some of their Hearers thought it necessary, and they thought it not so; and as refusing to Subscribe a Human Form of Words, and for these Reasons they are expell'd; tho' they offer'd to come to a fair and Christian hearing with their People, and the *Ministers*, who sat in Judgment on their Case; and would then have given an Account of the Hope that was in them, have reason'd from the Scriptures, and submitted to the Judgment of their People, whether to continue with them, or withdraw in Peace,

Peace. What the real Sentiments of those Ministers were, we might then have known, had they been treated in a fair and Christian manner; but neither you nor I can now tell what they are, 'till they think fit to declare them; and if they should never preach, or propagate the *Heretical* Notions they are accus'd of holding, as perhaps may prove to be the Case, this will then be but a small Reason for such an Outcry.

ANOTHER publick Case, nearer home, the Sufferer has given an Account of, which I leave as he does to the Judgment of the *Christian* World; with this Observation only, that the first Offence taken, seems to be more owing to his want of Faith in the *Damnatory* Clauses of the *Athanasian Creed*, than to any Declaration he had made of *Heretical* Tenets. I believe it will be allow'd, he has neither preach'd, nor propagated those *Heretical* Notions, of which he is accus'd.

BESIDES these two I have heard of a Third in the *West* Country, which has made some Noise but what that Case is I know not. It may be presumed, tho' I know it not, that some few private Persons, of no great Note or dangerous Influence, may have fallen into *Arian* Errors; but I dare say the Number is not great, if it had, we should have heard of it from themselves. Men that live in a Country of so much Liberty as ours is, are seldom very backward in discovering their Sentiments.

Put all this together, which is I think the farthest this Fear can Reasonably go, 'till we hear farther from you, what secret Intelligence you have of such numerous Enemies lying *Incognito*; is this I say a sufficient Reason for the Alarm you have taken, and sounded in the Ears of all Dissenters; which has called you up from that State of Quiescence, which you would choose to be in as to Controversy; which has struck the People with a *Panick*, not unlike the dreadful Terror of a Pestilence, when every one fears his Neighbour, his dearest Friend, lest he should be seized with the Infection, and Communicate the Contagion? You needed not all these Representations, of a great and imminent Danger, to justify your writing a *Pamphlet* in Defence of a *Christian Doctrine*; it is your Duty, when ever you see Occasion, to confirm your People in the Faith; and your Names would have been sufficient Inducement to every Dissenter, to read your Book for their Instruction and Confirmation, tho' they had not been told that our *All* lay at stake.

I could have wish'd that, in so large a Performance, which came out sometime after the Difference between you and your Brethren, about Subscription to an Article, you would have allow'd a Line or two, or a Word by way of *Post-script*, that you did not intend they should be included in your general Surmises: This, I think, would not have been an Offence to them, or unbe-

becoming your Charity ; who know they are not fallen from the Faith, but are your fellow-Labourers in the same Word and Doctrine. The *Accomplices* being suppos'd so numerous, as you represent them, gives some Hint to those, who follow the *Hue and Cry*, to lay hold on every honest Man they meet, who does not immediately give them all the Satisfaction, they are pleas'd to insist on.

I hope you will not neglect the first Opportunity of doing your Friends Justice, which indeed is doing Justice to your selves : If you should think fit to neglect it, and let Things take what Course they will, I dare say their Prudence and good Characters, their *Christian* and peaceable Behaviour, will bear them out in the World, and continue them in the Esteem of all good Men, to whom they are known.

IF there has not been so general a Danger, so urgent a Call as your Expressions Import, very few I believe will think such an Outcry any Service to the Cause of Truth ; but that on the contrary it may, by the publick Curiosity it has rais'd to search into this Matter, occasion more Persons being perverted to the Errors you oppose in one Year, than might otherwise have been in seven, in the quiet Way in which this Affair, supposing it real, was carrying on. Whoever amongst Dissenters may be suppos'd tending towards, or actually tainted with those Errors, they have been so prudent as not openly to avow them,

them, and propagate them. An Ordinary and common Care and Diligence might have sufficiently protected your Flocks from Danger: If any had been so daring, as in a private Way to attempt perverting them. Those plain *Christians*, who have more Piety than Learning or Curiosity, of which your Congregations chiefly consist, would never have been tempted to read Books of Controversy; they are generally to be depended upon, as adhering to those who have the ordinary Care of their Instruction: Should their Curiosity be raised by your Alarm to read on both Sides, which whoever are impartial will be apt to do, there are Books easily to be come at, written by learned Adversaries, whom you represent as not wanting cunning and plausible Colours for their Schemes, and by such Men the unwary, may very probably be caught, in Points allow'd to be very dark and *Mysterious*, and yet very dangerous every Way to those who mistake the Truth.

You very well remember the Case of another Controversy upon Points, by some of your Brethren esteem'd Fundamental, between the Followers of *Calvin*, and *Arminius*. There was for many Years, a most terrible Outcry against the Opinion of the undermost, as *Heretical* and *Intolerable*: What has this ended in? What an *Ancient* said upon another Occasion, *The whole World wonders to see it self Arminian.*

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How far a more quiet and calm Way of proceeding might have prevented the Effect we now see, I will not take upon me to say; it's plain however the Way that was taken did not do, nor will you I believe admit that it was the Truth of the Principles, that has made them so Triumphant.

How far you may think the present Case differs I know not, but we have seen that the Providence of God has not always interpos'd to hinder great Numbers falling into Error, even about this Doctrine, no more than about many others, that are as plain and as *Christian*, tho' not of so great Importance. Time will only shew whether my Fears, as to your Conduct, are just. You must be your own Judges in this Matter, I presume not to prescribe to your Prudence; I dare venture however to promise you, that you will meet with no Adversaries to your Doctrine from amongst your *Non-subscribing* Brethren; tho' I fear you will not miss having some from another Quarter.

I could have wish'd you had allow'd more room for *Scripture* Argument, that you would have mention'd the Scripture Proofs at length, instead of referring to the Places by Chapter and Verse; and that the other Parts of your Book had not intrench'd so much on that, as to leave but 15 Pages out of 140 for the true Argument; which if supported with that Clearness of Scripture-evidence, that is to be expected for Fundamentals,

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would have its full Effect on all *Christians*, that are not of a very obstinate Temper ; those who are perverse will not be moved by the most pathetic Exhortations and Warnings, and good *Christians* need them not ; but are fully convinced when they see *Scripture* Evidence. As these Truths depend entirely on *Scripture*, as they must be supposed very clearly revealed there, the keeping close to that might have had its Conveniencies.

YOUR Readers need not then have been refer'd to other Books for a fuller Account, nor put to the trouble of searching the Texts in their *Bibles* ; which they must do if they will not depend on you, that those Texts prove what you bring them for ; which is a Confidence in your Persons, which you will not expect from any, and which I hope, none of your Readers, who are not already fully satisfy'd in these Points, will put in you.

It could not then have been suppos'd by any that you design'd rather to Alarm, than Convince, as some may be apt to imagine, you having been so Brief on the only true Arguments, and so Large in those which are not true ones ; but which may endanger some Men's paying too great a Regard to Human Authority, and cast an *Odium* on others, who regard the *Scripture* alone in Points of pure Revelation.

I am sorry to see such a Numerous Collection of Human Testimonies produc'd by you, as witnessing

nessing to the Faith. You your selves would I believe be concern'd, if you thought this would be any, even the least reason of Assent to your Doctrine; which if it is not fully and sufficiently revealed in Scripture, all the *Witnessing* of the Churches cannot be the least Inducement to any Christian to Assent to it. O You need not have shewn the World that you were not singular in your Opinion, if you had been so on the Foundation of the *Scriptures*, you might have set the whole World at defiance, tho' they had *Witnessed* against you.

THIS Argument from the Consent of the Catholick Church, as the Pillar of Truth, as *Witnessing* in all Ages to the Scripture Doctrines, has been so basely manag'd by the Church of Rome, that I wonder to see any thing like it produced amongst Protestants: But this is a Subject that requires and deserves more room and time than I have now to bestow on it.

I shall only at present observe that the Numerous Collection of *Confessions*, you produce, as far as I understand them, do not agree; at least there is neither a Harmony of Words, nor Sense, between the *Ancient* ones and the *Modern*: There is indeed a great Harmony in Sound between, some of them, which are stuff'd with Human Words without a Meaning. I hope the Reader will try his Talent at understanding such Forms by the *Belgic Confession*, \* where if he fixes any

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\* *Doctrine of Trinity*, pag. 89.

Meaning to the Words used, I am much mistaken, if they amount not either to Contradictory Propositions, or gross Errors; but if they are taken in the Lump without a Meaning, they may by some be valued for their venerable Darknefs.

Pag. 47. "Your Observation that true *Christian* Virtue and Religion cannot be supported, but by this Belief, that a false Faith cannot be productive of a good and holy Life, that *Men do not gather Grapes of Thorns, or Figs of Thistles.*" This Observation is neither just, nor becoming Men of a Charitable Disposition; if you mean that a Virtuous, Good, and Holy Life will avail nothing, without a saving Faith; you have express'd your selves very oddly. Every Reader will, I believe, apprehend that you make a necessary Connexion between believing the *Trinity* in the *Orthodox* Sense, and a Holy Life. This Observation, I say, is not true in Fact; for those who are known to have wrong Notions as to this Point, and those who are suspected to have them do lead as Holy, Virtuous and good Lives as others: Your reasoning therefore is not justified by Fact, nor is it just reasoning in it self. The great Principles that influence Practice are the Belief of *God*, and his *Attributes* of *Holiness*, and *Justice*, and of a future State of Retribution; the great Inducements to Holiness are a lively Sense of the Love of *God* to Men in the Work of *Redemption*, and the Hopes of a Blessed *Immortality*.

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These great Principles; are held by all, a *Sabellian* a *Tritheist*, nay, even a *Socinian* is under the Influence of them. There appears no Connexion between just Notions of the Nature of the *Distinction* in the *Divine Essence*, and a good Life: But between the *Moral Attributes* of the Divine Being, and *Morality* in the Creatures, there is a plain and necessary Connexion, allowed by all. It has been taken very ill, and thought very unjust when those that held the Doctrine of *free Will* charged those, who held the Doctrine of absolute *Predestination*, as destroying all the Inducements to a holy Life; by a Doctrine that was the same, as that of the *Fatalists*: This was thought drawing unfair and uncharitable Consequences, and yet I dare appeal to the whole World whether the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, or that of *Predestination* have the greater and more immediate Connexion with *Morality*, and whether your Reasoning in this Case, is not as bad as theirs whom I have mention'd.

IN the same remarkable Paragraph, you say, "It should seem by the *new Scheme*, either that  
"such as have gone upon the *Old* are *perish'd*,  
"or that they have been brought to the Enjoyment  
"of the *true God*, by belief of, and dependence  
"upon a *false One*."

TO our shame, be it spoken, that are *Orthodox*, those of the *new Scheme* abhor any such thought, as that good Men are *perish'd*, because they held what they believ'd to be the Truth. This, I  
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am sorry for it, we must take amongst ourselves, it is our Side that make *Perishing* and *Saving*, depend on right Notions in this *Mysterious Point*; it is our Side that make "Error in its own Nature Damnable, whether the Heart has been sincere in Examination or not; and that leave no way of Escape, but by that rich and infinite Grace and Mercy," \* which possibly may extend to pardon even the vilest, the most wicked, and obstinate Sinners; with whom those who err in this Point, are set on a perfect Level: And this is covered over with a great deal of Charity, We judge no Man's State hereafter, we damn no Man; we only declare that he, that errs in his Conceptions about the *Trinity*, is in as damnable a State, as any Man can be in; but we exclude no Man a possibility of being saved. Lo, this is our abundant Charity! †

GIVE me leave, *Reverend Gentlemen*, to speak for my self, and some few others, who may join with me in this Request; that it may suffice for us to be sound in our own Faith, without declaring the Errors of others damnable, that we may believe our *Creed* without adding *dammatory Clauses* to it, that we may be at Liberty not to stand in need of that fine Distinction between *Errors in their own Nature damnable, and that will not prove eventually so to those who persevere in the holding them; \*\** That we may be at Liber-

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\* *Doctrine of the Trinity*. pag. 11. † *Ibid.* pag. 10.

\*\* *Ibid.* 11.

ty not so much as to fear the *Perishing* of any of our *Predecessors*, whose holy and exemplary Lives we have been Witnesses of ; tho' they did not agree with us in our Notions of this great *Mystery* ; " that we may not doubt the *Operation* of " *God's Holy Spirit* in *owning* and *accompanying* their " useful Labours," tho' they differ'd widely from us in their *Philosophical* Conceptions of this *Mystery*. \*

I have now done, for the present, with my Observations on your *Book* and your *Conduct*. I have said enough, and perhaps too much, if you prove truly such sincere and peaceable Men, as I hope you will. I am sure Peace between you and your Brethren is what, they, and you, and every *Dissenter*, ought to desire on many Accounts. I should conceive that Peace might easily be brought about, when both Sides are, as they ought to be, inclinable and dispos'd to it. One Side are concerned about Truth, the other about Liberty ; Those that are zealous for Truth would take it ill, should they be suppos'd Enemies to Liberty ; Those on the Side of Liberty would take it as ill, to be supposed Enemies to Truth. It is the Happiness of the Cause of Liberty, that it wants no more to support it, than what is necessary to the Support of Truth ; no Damage can be done to *Christian* Liberty, but what will equally endanger Truth ; the great Enemy of both, is making some Men's Judgments the Rule of others. Suffer me there-

\* *Doctrine of Trinity*. pag. 47.

fore to propose this short Expedient, which both Sides seem to me pretty well agreed in already. I hope it will not be call'd a *Canon*, till such time as it has your Approbation.

THAT every Dissenter, when properly call'd on to do it, be at Liberty, free from all Restraints and Reflections, to give an Account of his Faith either from *Scripture*, with a readiness to explain as far as he is able, his Sense of any Passage there; or in *Forms* composed by other Men, or in his own Words.

THAT all be advised to allow this Liberty, and *Christians* left to Judge on such Declarations, as they shall see Cause. If you are agreed in this, it will easily follow that you make mutual Declarations of your Love and Esteem for each other, forgetting all that is past, and walking together in Love and Unity, as *Christians* ought to do.

MUCH I hope need not be said to incline you to this Method, or something like it.

FROM the World you are generally to expect nothing but trouble, you are a small Number, naturally weak, and Division amongst you will make you inconsiderable, nay the Scorn and Contempt of your Enemies.

YOU are at present bless'd with a most Excellent and Gracious King, a true *Defender* of the Faith against its most dangerous Enemies, *Oppression* and *Persecution*, a Friend to Liberty, whose greatest Happiness is to maintain his People in the

the full Enjoyment of it. You have had the Comfort to see a *British Parliament*, almost entirely Members of the *Establish'd Church*, take your Case into Consideration; and, notwithstanding the Clamours of Multitudes of Zealots, restore to you your former Privileges: A Parliament that has shewn so great a Regard to tender Consciences, as to reject a Proposition for laying a new Yoke on them, when *some of those*, who pretend to be your *Friends* were for imposing it, and when *some among your selves* would have applauded them for doing it. You have the Happiness to see a greater Number, than ever were before, of *Bishops* and *Clergy* in the *Establish'd Church*, who are upon *Principle* Friends to *Christian Liberty*; Men of such distinguish'd Characters and Abilities, as give the best Prospect we have ever yet seen, of clearing the *Protestant* World from the remains of a *Superstitious, narrow, poor and stingy* Temper, and setting *Christianity* on that noble generous Foot, on which it was first propagated over the World; and thereby restoring that Peace, Love, and Charity among *Christians*, which was the Glory of the *Apostolical* Age, and which for so many Ages since has been banish'd, by the Imposing Arbitrary Temper of Proud and Foolish Men.

WHAT a glorious Prospect is this, what Joy must it give to every wise and good Man? But at the same time what Concern to think, how uncertain and precarious such Expectations are,

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that depend on the Continuance perhaps of a few precious Lives; or on the turn of a Party in a Country so much given to Change as ours is. The slightest turn of Human Affairs may change this pleasing Vision into Darknefs and Horror.

THESE Changes, of which you have seen so many, ought always to keep you on the Watch; that your Conduct in times of Prosperity may be such, as you will not be ashamed of in Adversity. Suppose those numerous Enemies of your Liberties possess'd of that Power, which they value on no Account more, than as it gives them an Opportunity to humble you, and triumph over you; Consider your selves a poor divided Body, that need that Indulgence, which you will not shew to one another; imagine your Enemies insulting you, when they have you in their Power.—Are you the Men that plead for Gospel Liberty, that have such scrupulous and tender Consciences, that you will not comply with the best Church in the World, that find fault even with *Discipline* and *Ceremonies* because not appointed in *Scripture*, who refuse to submit to Human Authority even in Trifles? Have you, with *Liberty* and *Conscience* in your Mouths, endeavour'd to Abridge the Liberty of your own Brethren, put *Human Tests* upon them in Matters of Faith, and set at nought their Appeal to *Scripture* as their Rule, treated such Appeal as a *Stiffness* of *Humour* and *Punctilio* of *Honour*; and do you plead  
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or that Indulgence from us, which you will not allow to others? We will teach you what it is to obey, to submit to our Judgment, instead of Judging your Brethren; you shall have *Tests* and *Impositions* laid on you, such as will humble you, you may cry out but the World will laugh at you.

THIS and a great deal more you may expect to hear from those, who are ready to take any occasion to aggravate your Faults, and who will not consider all the Excuses you may make, and all the Distinctions you may offer to avoid the Charge; if any Part of it remains, it wounds the Vitals of your Liberty. Add to these Discouragements from without what you may expect from those, who are your Friends and Brethren; who are pleas'd to reckon themselves supporters of *Christian Liberty*, in supporting you; who, so far from being ashamed of the Name, count it reputable to be numbered among *Protestant Dissenters*. Should any thing be done to impair that Liberty, which has been your Glory, that Freedom of Interpreting the *Scriptures* for themselves, of judging for themselves what to believe from thence; should human Authority be countenanced or allowed any Pretence to controul that Judgment, should some Mens *Consequences* from *Scripture* be made a Rule to others, who do not discern the Justness of them, should the *Faith* and Liberty of *Dissenters* be shackled with human *Tests*, enforced by themselves; and under these

Circumstances should Discouragements come upon you from the Powers of this World ; consider what Inducements would remain, to incline Men to suffer with you ? Will they not be apt to say, if we must not judge for ourselves, if we must suffer Scandal or Reproach from our Brethren, if we will not give up our Judgments to theirs ; if we cannot enjoy the Liberty of forming our own Judgment on *Scripture*, without exposing our selves to their Resentment and Anger ? Had we not better submit to the Authority of the *Legislature*, when our Liberty of Opinion will not be more restrained, than it is amongst our selves, and we shall have the Advantage to be free from suffering in our Temporal Interest ? This would be the Reasoning of many, what under such Circumstances should induce them to Reason otherwise ? Shall they be suppos'd to think, that they cannot have the *Gospel* Preach'd, but by you ; shall they prefer your Judgment, Learning, and Talents to any they can meet with elsewhere ; Esteem your preaching Solid and Edifying, and that of others Frothy and Worldly ? This may be the Opinion of many honest good People, who have always had an abundant Value for your Abilities, whose Knowledge proceedeth from your Lips, and whose Zeal is pointed by your Direction. As to those, who are at present both your Ornament and Defence, tho' they have a just Value for your Persons and Abilities ; yet, you know, they are attach'd to your Interest more on the Account

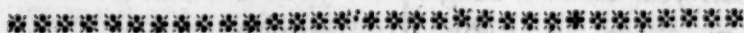
count of *Christian Liberty*, than on any other. Should you be willing to see them leave you now, or hereafter in the Time of your Distress? Can you think a Regard to your Persons can retain them in your Communion, when there ceases to be any material Difference between you and other Churches as to this great Point of Gospel Liberty? Can it be a Pleasure to you to have a great and uncontrouled Sway over part of a weak'n'd, and divided Interest; rather than a just and moderate Influence on a numerous, and united Body? far be such wretched low Views from Men of your Character!

To these Considerations may be added all those, which arise from your Characters as Ministers of the *Gospel*, from your Duty as *Christians*, from the Love and Esteem you owe to your *Brethren*; which will present themselves to your Minds more justly, and fully, than I am able to suggest them. After the Consideration of these Things, try if you can set your Hearts against offer'd Peace?





# APPENDIX.



CONSTANTINE the Conqueror, the  
Great, the August, to ALEXANDER and  
ARIUS.



Understand that the Disputes among  
you, have arisen on this Occasion.  
That you, *Alexander*, did ask the  
*Presbyters* of your Church, what was  
their Opinion concerning a Passage  
of our *Law*, or rather touching a useless Question;  
and that you, *Arius*, did make a very indiscreet  
Answer, which ought not to have enter'd into  
your Mind, or if it had, ought never to have  
proceeded out of your Lips. From hence have  
arisen your Quarrels and Disputes, Communion  
has been denied, the Faithful have been thrown  
into Factions, and that Love and Harmony broken,  
which unites the Body of the Church. ---  
Let each of you mutually ask, and grant Pardon  
to each other, on those reasonable Terms,  
which I, that am your fellow Servant, propose  
to you. Tho' such unnecessary Questions may  
serve to exercise the Wits of those, who have a  
great deal of Leisure; yet ought they rather to  
be kept secret, than unadvisedly publish'd before  
the

## APPENDIX. 71

the People. How few are there, who are capable sufficiently to penetrate so sublime a Subject, or express themselves in Words suitable to its Dignity! were there any able to explain it, how few amongst the People would comprehend it!

THE most Accurate cannot enter into the Examination of such Questions, without Danger of falling into great Mistakes. Such Subjects ought never to be spoken of, but with the greatest Caution; lest those, who attempt to explain them, should do it imperfectly; or those, that hear them should form too gross Conceptions, and the People by that Means either fall into Blasphemy, or Schism.

WHEREFORE, let him who has ask'd a Question indiscreetly, and he who has answer'd it improperly, mutually pardon each other. There is no Difference between you, concerning any great Command of our Law, or concerning the Worship we owe to God; as to these Things you are of one Mind, you may therefore easily reunite in the same Communion.

IT is neither decent, nor reasonable that you should be permitted to govern the People of God, while you quarrel, with so much Heat, about such minute Subjects. Give me leave to use a small Example, which may serve to instruct you in your Duty? You know that tho' the *Philosophers* of the same Sect do agree in the same general Principles, yet they often differ in some particular Expressions: This, however,  
does

does not hinder them from keeping a good Understanding with each other. Is it not much more reasonable that you, who have the Honour of being the Ministers of God, and who agree in the Profession of the same Religion, should love one another?

LET me intreat you, to reflect seriously on what I am saying to you; consider with yourselves, whether it is reasonable, that for an Idle dispute about Words, Brethren should arm themselves against Brethren, and divide the Holy Assembly of the Faithful? What a wretched Conduct is this, more becoming the Ignorance of the lowest amongst the People, or the Weakness of Children, than the Learning and Wisdom, with which *Presbyters* ought to be endu'd? Let us fly from the Snares, which the Devil lays for us. Our great God, the common Saviour of all Men, has dispens'd to us all the same Light; permit me, I intreat you, permit me, who place my Glory in serving and honouring him, to finish, by his Assistance, the Work I have begun; to excite his People, with the greatest Earnestness to reunite in the same Communion, since you profess the same Faith, since you are agreed in the great Principles of Religion, and in the Observation of the same Commandments, which oblige you to the greatest Harmony of Affection. The Subject of your contest not concerning any capital Article of Piety, it ought not to have produc'd a Schism amongst you: I say,  
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not this to oblige you all to be of the same Mind in Opinions of small Consequence, or in the Points of your Dispute whatever they be, since we cannot think exactly alike on all Subjects, all Men not having the same Capacity and Understanding, you may keep Peace and Communion, tho' you are not agreed in these Things. Continue in the same Sentiment, and the same Faith as to the Unity of God, and the Extent of his Providence; and if in disputing, with too much Subtilty, on vain and useless Questions, you cannot agree with one another; let each keep his own Opinion in the secret of his Heart: But keep inviolably the Bond of Charity, the *Christian* Faith, and the Precepts of the Law. Return to each other's Bosom, embrace affectionately, drive Hatred and Anger out of your Breasts, own each other as Brethren. Friendship is sometimes more tender and more sincere, after a Reconciliation than before the Rupture.

DELIVER me from my Concern and Anxiety, restore to me the Joy of the Day, and the Repose of the Night; if this be not done, how can I avoid melting with Tears, and consuming my Days in Grief? How can I be joyful, while the People of God, my dear fellow Servants are torn asunder by a pernicious Schism? That you may comprehend the Greatness of my Sorrow, let me inform you, that being but lately arriv'd at *Nicomedia*, I intended immediately to set out thence for the *East*; just as I was hastening

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towards you and got the best part of my Way, this News stop'd me, for fear I should see with my own Eyes, what I can hardly bear so much as to hear. — Open to me then by your Reconciliation, the Way you have shut by your Quarrels: Act in such a Manner, that I may see you and the People with Joy, and may render my thanks to God for your Agreement. \*

EUSEBIUS says, The Contest was too great, to be appeased by a Letter, the Fury and Zeal increas'd, and spread over the whole *East*; which was owing to the Envy and Malice of the Devil, who could not bear to see the Church in Prosperity.

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\* I produce not this Letter with any View to the suppos'd Controversy of this Time about *Arianism*, [of which I have yet seen nothing produc'd among *Dissenters*, but on the *Orthodox Side*.] but to shew that Excellent Spirit of Charity, which shines so brightly thro'out it; as to be a noble Example to *Christians* in all Ages, and in all Controversies; and a just Reproach to some in our time, who shew so little of that lovely Temper.

What would this good *Emperor* have said, had he seen the Disputes of our Day, not about the Deity of *Christ*, as that between *Alexander* and *Arius*; but whether *human Articles*, or the *Holy Scriptures* express'd the Faith most Properly? I fear he would have had greater Reason for saying what he does in this Letter; That it was neither decent nor reasonable, that some Men should govern the People of God, while they quarrel'd with so much Heat about such Subjects.





*A short ACCOUNT of some late Alterations in the CHURCH of GENEVA, relating to subscribing ARTICLES.*

THE Church of *Geneva*, which has been deservedly look'd upon as one of the Glories of the *Reformation*, did, in common with the rest of the Reformed Churches, retain the Usage that had prevail'd before the *Reformation*, of having a great Number of Human *Expositions* of the *Scripture* Doctrine, and Rules of *Discipline*, enjoyned as *Tests*, to be subscribed by all those who were to be admitted to the Work of the Ministry. They thought it proper to purge away the gross Errors and Absurdities, which had prevail'd under *Papish* Darkness and Tyranny; but could not think of parting with the Power of fixing, and determining the Sense of *Scripture* for those, who should fall under their Care. As they thought it was no difficult Matter to find the Meaning of *Scripture*, when the Dread and Terror of the *Papish* Power over all those, who presum'd to judge for themselves, was removed; so they thought it their Duty to inforce on others, what was clear to themselves. They did not see the Dangerous

Consequences, that might *equally* follow from their Imposition, on pretence of the Clearness, Certainty, and *Fundamentality* of certain Points ; as from the Pretence of Infallibility in the Apostate Church of *Rome*. They went so far as to maintain, that the Sword of the Magistrate was to be employ'd in securing *Gospel-truth*, and extirpating Error ; they put to a Cruel Death *Servetus*, who if he held some Opinions imputed to him, his Enthusiasm and Extravagance might have made some Atonement for what would have been *Heresy* in one that was in his right Senses. This sad Example ought not so much to be imputed to those otherwise good Men, who were the Promoters of it ; as to that absurd and unreasonable Principle, That some Men are to judge for others in Matters of Faith. The more we value and admire their Persons, the more we ought to detest and abhor those *Principles*, that could lead even such *good Men* into such *evil Actions*.

THE Church of *Geneva* had from the Beginning a pretty numerous Set of Articles, which all Ministers were to subscribe. They had a new Addition made to them, at the Desire of some of the *Swiss* Protestant *Cantons*, occasion'd by some warm Controversies then on Foot, which made them insist that those of *Geneva*, should incorporate into their Articles, and as it were naturalize certain Points of *Orthodoxy*, which the good People of *Switzerland* were very fond of ; a-

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mongst others, that *Hebrew Points* were of Divine Original, and Institution; tho' five Parts in six of the Learned World have thought them of human, and comparatively modern Invention. This Additional Recruit of *Credenda*, —call'd the *Consensus*, was likewise to be Subscrib'd by all Ministers in this Form. *Sic sentio, Contraria his nunquam docebo.*—These I assent to, the contrary to these I will never teach. This Load of Subscriptions, consisting of 64 Articles, the Particulars of which are too long here to relate, continued amongst them till the Year 1706. when a Divine of *Neufchâstel*, Mr. *Jacques Vial de Beaumont*, a very worthy Minister of the Gospel, being called to *Geneva* to exercise his Ministry there, was required to Subscribe, in the Manner I have mention'd, that numerous Set of Articles. He instead of Subscribing, as requir'd, writ to this Effect, These I assent to as far as they agree with the *Holy Scriptures*, which I believe to be the Word of God; I will always teach, what God shall teach me from thence, and will never knowingly maintain or teach anything contrary thereunto. This was so far from giving Satisfaction to some grave Ministers, before whom the Subscription was made, that they thought it an Insolent Affront to themselves, and the Discipline of their Church, and refus'd him his Licence of Preaching. Upon this, he appeal'd to the Body of Divines of that *Republick*, where the Question, between the compleat Sufficiency of *Scripture* to all the Purposes  
of

of *Christianity* on one Side; and the *Necessity* of *Human Articles* and *Decisions* to fix the Sense of *Scripture* on the other, was learnedly and fully debated, and at last determined on the Side of the Sufficiency of *Scripture*; and Mr. *Vial*'s Subscription held Satisfactory. From the Ministers an Appeal was lodged before the Magistrates, who, apprehending it dangerous to depart from the old Rule, determined in favour of their old Articles, and enjoyn'd the Subscription to them. Those generous and truly Catholick Divines, who had supported Mr. *Vial*, thought it not fit to acquiesce in this Determination; but appeal'd to the *Dernier Resort*, which is there called the *Council* of two hundred, who upon mature Deliberation settled this Matter, and determined, that for the future the following Oath should be a sufficient Qualification for those, who were to be licens'd as Ministers, viz. ' I swear and declare in the Presence  
' of God, that I do hold the Holy Scripture to be  
' the only Rule of my Faith, and that it contains,  
' in a very clear Manner, whatever is necessary to  
' Salvation; and I promise that I will be conformable thereunto, both in my Doctrine and Practice. ' To this is added the following Exhortation by the Person who administers the Oath.  
' You are exhorted not to teach any Thing contrary to the Decisions of the *Synod* of *Dort*, the  
' forty *Articles* of Faith of the Reformed Churches  
' of *France*, or to our *Catechism*, they being esteemed agreeable to the *Scriptures*; and you are exhorted

‘horted to this for the Sake of Peace and Union  
‘in the Church. \*’

IT were to be wish’d, that this Church, which has been by many admired for the Purity of her Doctrine, and the Compleatness of her Reformation, might be a Pattern to others to imitate her in this farther and glorious Reformation; whereby the last Remains of a *Popish* and *Imposing* Spirit have been banish’d, and a *Protestant Church* render’d compleatly consistent with *Protestant Principles*; and enabled to defend itself against the formidable Attacks of the Church of *Rome*, which some, who have retained *Human Authority* in Matters of Faith, have been hardly able to do.

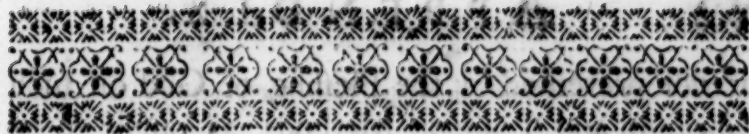
I CANNOT omit on this Occasion mentioning our Countryman Mr. *Fox*, Author of the *Martyrology*; he found to his great Surprize, that after all that had been suffer’d by those *glorious Martyrs*, whose History he had written, for their Opposition to *Human Decisions*, these were still insisted on. He was required to give his Assent to our Articles, which I may venture to say are as true, and as well drawn up as those of any other *Protestant Church*: It does not appear, that Mr. *Fox*

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\* This Account may be depended upon as to the main Facts, and particularly the present Form of qualifying Ministers to preach. The Story is too material, to be neglected on this Occasion; and if there be any Mistakes, as to some Circumstances of no great Moment, Care shall be taken to have a more particular and exact Account of them, as soon as it can be procured from a Place at so considerable a Distance. In the mean time, the Reader may see some Account of this Affair in Mr. *Misson’s Voyage to Italy*, p. 458. tho’ he was not fully informed.

had any Difficulty as to the Contents of them; however he thought fit to come with his *Greek Testament* in his Hand, and said this is the Word of God, and this is my Rule, and to this only will I subscribe. The venerable Character of that holy Man preserved him from any Prosecution during his whole Life, tho' what he had done was contrary to an *Act of Parliament*; and tho' good Queen *Elizabeth* did not easily suffer any to disobey either her Laws, or her Will. Many other Instances, were it necessary, might be produced to shew, that it is no *New Scheme*, for good Men to assert the *Sufficiency of Scripture* for all the Purposes of true *Christianity*, without needing the Help of *Human Decisions*.





*The SENTIMENTS of several Gentlemen  
touching the Methods of Healing the pre-  
sent Divisions among PROTESTANT  
DISSENTERS.*



THE good Providence of God having inclined the Heart of his Majesty, and both Houses of Parliament to restore to Us those just Rights, of which We had before been deprived; and thereby put Us in a greater Capacity of contributing to the Welfare and Prosperity of Our Country; We ought to hold our Selves obliged to take all those just and proper Methods, That may render Us the most capable of Publick Service, and may shew Us fit Objects of that Regard, which the Legislature has had to Us. Above all Things We ought to support those truly Christian Principles of Liberty and Charity, which have hitherto been the greatest Ornaments of Our Profession; and which are the only Foundations, on which We can justly claim an Indulgence from the Powers of this World to Our own particular Sentiments.

IT is with the greatest Concern, that We have heard of some unhappy religious Differences and Disputes, amongst some of Our Brethren in the West Country; which are likely to spread farther,

if not prevented by the Blessing of God on such Christian and Prudent Methods, as ought to be taken to avert so great a Calamity and Reproach to Us, as We are Christians, and a Body of Men differing in Opinion from the Majority of the Nation.

WE ought therefore to do all that lies in our Power to prevent such Divisions among Our Selves, as would weaken Our Common Interest, and expose Us to the Reflection and Contempt of our Friends, and the Insults of those that wait for Opportunities to overturn the Liberty We at present enjoy.

WE would by all proper Means promote Peace among Our Brethren, and thereby the true Interest of our Country ; but We ought not to pursue such good Ends by any Methods, that are inconsistent with the Spirit of Christianity ; nor ought We, in order to procure a seeming Peace and Quiet, to make use of any of those Ways, which We have so justly complain'd of in others, as laying an unreasonable Yoke on the Consciences of Christians.

WHATSOEVER Human Declarations, or Doctrinal Tests the Civil or Ecclesiastical Powers of the several Christian Countries have thought fit to enjoin, (tho' contrary to each other) yet ought We to stand to that undoubted Protestant Principle, which We have hitherto glory'd in ; that the Holy Scriptures are the only Rule of the Faith and Practice of Christians. Having these Principles

ciples fix'd in Our Minds, as undoubted Rules and Standards for directing our Conduct, We conceive the following Methods will be the most agreeable to such evident Principles, as well as the most Prudent that can be taken to prevent the several Mischiefs, which have been mentioned, and which We have Reason to believe will follow from a different Conduct.

1.) That We should all of Us, according to Our several Capacities and Opportunities, and in a more especial Manner those that are Ministers of the Gospel of Peace, endeavour to allay all unreasonable Jealousies concerning the Sentiments and Opinions of others, particularly Ministers. That the Christian Principles of Charity, and mutual Forbearance should be promoted. That an Intemperate Degree of Zeal in judging of the Christianity and Sincerity of their Brethren should be avoided; and that Peace and Love, which are the great Characteristicks of Christians, be as much as is possible obtained.

2.) If this Method shall not be found effectual, but notwithstanding some Christians shall accuse others, or their own Ministers as not holding the Christian Faith, or as propagating Opinions, which they conceive to be inconsistent with it; that no such Accusation should be in the least regarded by Ministers or others, to whom Application shall be made for Advice on such Occasions; unless two or more Persons shall subscribe their Names to such Accusation, as plainly and openly

accusing, and being ready to support and justify such Accusation: That by this Means all private Insinuations, tending to give Scandal, may be avoided, and Proceedings may be had in that open and sincere Way which the Gospel prescribes.

3.) THAT when there is a proper Accusation made, and duly Supported as aforesaid, the Person Accused should be first privately Admonished, before the Matter be brought under the Examination of any publick Assembly, or the Person accused put under the Necessity of publicly Defending himself.

4.) IF at last any shall be call'd to so Difficult a Work, as that of Judging the Faith of their Brethren, and Determining their Title to the Name of Christians, their Capacity of being Members of Christian Churches, and their Hopes of Salvation; We assure Our Selves They will, in a Matter of so great Moment, adhere Stedfastly to the Protestant Principle; will make use of no human Decisions, human Forms, or Compositions either to torture or condemn their Christian Brethren: That they will think nothing, but the plain and express Declarations of Holy Scripture, a sufficient Authority to Justifie their Condemning any, as not holding the Faith necessary to Salvation; and that in so awful a Case as Judging the Servants of Our Common Lord and Master They will, We doubt not, act as those who Expect his Appearance.

5.) IF

5.) IF any Minister or Congregation shall differ, as to the Expediency of these Methods, or shall think any other more proper ; We hope They will, as intending the same good End, still preserve Charity and Communion with those Ministers and Congregations, that shall think fit to pursue these Advices.

We hope That, by the Blessing of God on these Methods, all the Dangers We apprehend may be prevented ; but if Our Endeavours prove Ineffectual to those Ends, We shall have the Comfort, That We have not neglected Our Duty as Men and Christians.

*These Sentiments were laid before a Committee of Ministers and Gentlemen, Febr. the 5th, and were transmitted by them to the Body of Ministers met at Salters-Hall, Febr. 24. 1719.*

THESE were the Sentiments of several Gentlemen, who subscribed their Names to them ; None of them, I believe, have alter'd their Minds since ; as indeed there appears no Reason why they should, tho' they have not yet had the Satisfaction to see the good End of Peace answer'd, which they proposed by them. Their Names none has a Right to publish without the Leave of each particular Gentleman, tho' none of them need conceal their Names, were any good End to be served by it. This I may venture

ture to say, that an equal Number of Persons of so considerable a Character in every Respect is not perhaps to be found amongst the rest of the Dissenters.

THIS Paper was not intended, as has been without any Colour suggested, to make Rules and *Canons* for other Peoples Conduct, the Liberty of offering Advice when there is an urgent Occasion belongs to all Men ; but it was design'd to put the Ministers upon acting, in the most effectual Way they could, to prevent those Mischiefs which have since happened, and was for that End sent to them to make such Alterations and such Use of it as they should judge proper ; accordingly some Alterations and Additions were made which the Publick is now Possessed of.

I shall only make two or three Observations relating to some Observations that have been made to these Sentiments; supposing there were any just and considerable Objections against them [which I see no Reason to admit] it would have been to all impartial Persons a sufficient Apology, that they were intended to promote a good End, drawn up by those who were above having any low View to Interest or Party, and left to the Alteration of those whose Duty it was to take care of the Peace of Christians.

1.) It has been objected, that They were wholly contrived for Peace, and nothing done for Truth.

I could wish those who make this Objection, would tell us of any other good Method of promoting Truth, besides a sincere and diligent Examination and Endeavour with God's Assistance to find out Truth; and Liberty to own it when found out. There was no need to suggest these Methods of promoting Truth in this Paper, when every Protestant Dissenter was supposed to be fully instructed in them; there are indeed other Methods of promoting particular Truths, which will equally serve to promote the contrary Errors, as Times and Circumstances change: These it is presumed, those who make the Objection would not have desired to have been mentioned, or if they had, the Gentlemen who sign'd this Paper had too much Sense and Charity to have inserted them.

2.) It's Objected that tho' an Accusation ought to be by two Witnesses, yet there is no Scripture Rule for its being in writing, or their Signing their Names.

THE Gentlemen, I dare say, laid no great Stress on this particular, and were not at all displeas'd to see it alter'd. They did indeed think that it was no very desirable thing to have frequent and unnecessary Accusations, nor an Inconvenience to put any reasonable Difficulty in the Way of those, who were continually on the Watch to catch Expressions, and pry out imaginary Errors: And this Difficulty need not have hinder'd any Accusation, by those who thought them-

themselves oblig'd in Conscience to clear the Church of a rotten and dangerous Member. It has formerly been found necessary to lay greater Restraints than these on Ecclesiastical Accusations, and may perhaps be found necessary again, tho' some Men may at present be mightily pleas'd to see the Church clear'd of those who are not agreeable to them.

3.) It has been objected that no one pretends to it, or can be call'd on to judge the *Faith* of their *Brethren*, determine their Title to the *Name of Christians*, and their *hopes of Salvation*.

Do not They judge the Faith of their Brethren, who declare it Heretical? Do not they determine that their Brethren are no Christians, who declare their Faith to be contrary to the *Fundamental Articles* of the *Christian Religion*?

Do not they judge of the Hopes and Expectations of Salvation of their Brethren, who declare that they hold *Errors* that are *damnable* in their *own Nature*, and have no Cause or Reason to expect to be saved while they continue to hold those Errors? that declare them out of the Ordinary Way of Salvation, deprived of the Assistance of Gods Grace, and left without Hope but from Infinite and uncovenanted Mercy.

NONE could from these Words imagine that the Gentlemen thought the Judgment of some Men really affected the Salvation of others, or that any could pass a determinative Judgment besides the Judge of all Flesh; but they did think,

think, and do now see, that some Men would determine that others had no Reason to hope for Salvation while they held Errors esteemed destructive. It is somewhat to be wondred at, that those who can distinguish between the damning Nature of Error, and the eternal State of the Erroneous, could not apply that Distinction to Words, that are so obviously calculated for it, that amount to no more than this, that if Men justly deserve to be remov'd, for Error in Opinion or Practice, from the Communion of Christians, they have no Reason while they continue in the same Course to hope for Salvation; this is said every Day from the Pulpit, and yet it is strange to see that, upon certain Occasions, some Men will not so much as understand the same Propositions, which they themselves Assert on others.

Other Objections have been made much about the Size of these; it may be said of these Sentiments that there was no Objection drop'd that could enter into the Minds of the Objectors, who were some of them so free as to declare that they would embarrass, delay, and oppose the Proceeding on them as much as possibly they could; But as these Objections equally lie against the Advices pass'd by the *Non-Subscribing* Ministers, I leave others to answer them, which I hope will be done effectually; especially as to the main Point whether Scripture, or human Decisions, Tests, and Articles be the best, or the most

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p. 91.

Christian Way of trying, and determining who are found in Fundamentals, and who are fit to be admitted to Christian Communion.

THE World is now left to judge whether this Paper could give any just Occasion for that violent Opposition it met with, when if any thing was amiss in it, it was left to the Alteration of those to whom it was sent. It has had as to all the material Contents of it, the entire Approbation of the Majority, and of many of the Minority, tho' some have thought fit to take Occasion from hence to make a pernicious Rupture, which I pray God may not be of long Continuance.





*The following LETTER was written by a large Number of Gentlemen, met together March the 24th, and by them sent to the Ministers, who subscribed the Advices, after their Brethren had withdrawn from them.*

REVEREND GENTLEMEN,

SEVERAL of us having, some time since, laid before you our Sentiments, concerning the Methods of procuring Peace and healing Divisions among our Brethren; We think it incumbent on us to return our thanks to you, for that Approbation you have given to our sincere Intentions for the publick Good, and that commendable Diligence you have shewn in pursuing, and endeavouring to accomplish so good a Work.

It is with Concern that We hear some Reflections were in your Debates made on our Conduct, and a good Design was blamed, because Lay-men had presum'd first to propose it. Such Reflections were the harder, in regard we had shewn a just Deference to you, in submitting what We laid before you to such Alterations, as you should judge proper. Giving  
Christian

p. 89, 92.

Christian Advice, according to the best of our Judgment, We hope is a Fault in none : A Concern for Religion, and the general good of Christians is the Duty both of Ministers and their Hearers.

A High Value for their own Persons and Conduct, and Contempt of others, as it very ill becomes any ; so it must Principally those, who are Teachers of Religion ; and especially such, who in this respect at least are Followers of the Apostles, as being destitute of the Supports and Establishments of this World, and who should therefore the rather imitate their Example in Christian Condescension, that by their Practice as well as their Doctrine they may promote the great Ends of their Ministry.

*as p. 91.*  
We are satisfy'd that a Disregard for the Advice of Lay-Christians in General, could not be approved of by the Body of our Ministers, and we hope those, who have express'd it, will so far consider their own Character and Profession, as to be sorry for what they have said, and avoid the same improper Conduct for the future.

{ *W* H O' you that are our Ministers, have hitherto managed the Concerns of the Body of Dissenters, in such a Manner, as not to render our having a Share in your Deliberations necessary ; yet We cannot but put you in Mind on this Occasion, when We have been blamed for a very inoffensive Conduct, That the Protestant Churches

## APPENDIX. 93

Churches have thought it just and necessary to admit Lay-Christians to bear a Part in their public Assemblies for Advice and Deliberation.

We are very sorry that the Difficulty, you have met with in your Proceedings, has occasion'd so long a Delay; as to hinder in a great Measure the good Effect, which your Christian Advices might have had in procuring either Peace, or at least a just and reasonable Conduct among our Dissenting Brethren at *Exeter*. We are Surpris'd to hear now, what we were formerly told, was unreasonable to suspect, that 13 Trustees there have taken upon them, by virtue of a Legal Trust, to exclude their Ministers from the Use of their Places of Worship; without calling the Congregations together, who, as We are inform'd, consist of many Hundred Communicants.

THE Character of their Ministers, who have been justly, and universally Esteem'd for the Defence they have made of our Common Liberty, and the Service their Writings have done our Common Interest, justly Merits our Regard and Concern for their Persons.

THE Usage they have met with, calls upon us all to prevent the Scandal, and dangerous Tendency of such a Conduct. If a small Number of Men, in whom a Trust and Confidence is placed, by a large Congregation, in Regard to their Riches and Power, shall take upon them, under Colour of Temporal Laws, to dissolve, as  
much

much as in them lies, the Spiritual Relation between Ministers and their People, by preventing the Exercise of their Ministry ; that, which is a Matter purely of a religious Nature, will be made a Temporal Property, to be manag'd at the Will and Pleasure of a few, not restrain'd by those Rules, which even the Laws have made as to Lay-Patrons in the Establish'd Church.

WE desire you would, as your Prudence shall direct, endeavour to prevent the Differences at *Exeter*, coming to a shameful Extremity ; that, if the People there are dissatisfy'd with their Ministers, they would at least proceed to remove them, in a Regular and Christian Manner ; and not bring a Reproach on Dissenters in General, by an Arbitrary and unchristian Proceedure, and We believe none of your Brethren will refuse to assist you in such Endeavours.

It is with the highest Satisfaction, We find you have stedfastly adher'd to that great Principle, which We Glory in, that the Word of God alone is the Rule of Faith ; that you have oppos'd every thing, that may tend to subject those to the Words of Men, and Tests injoin'd by human Authority, who owe their Assent and Obedience to the Law and Doctrine of Christ alone.

1. SHALL we, who constantly plead against all Imposition in religious Matters, tho' of Things in themselves Lawful ; who separate from a
2. Church Establish'd by the Laws of our Contry, on account of Scruples of Conscience, relating to

to Ceremonies in religious Worship and Ecclesiastical Discipline ; shall We approve of setting up, or countenancing Forms of Men's inventing in Matters of Faith, when We have that unerring Form of sound Words, the Holy Scriptures continually before us, by which alone we shall be judged at the last Day, and which alone ought to be the Rule of our judging one another ?

Y o u will, We question not, constantly endeavour to Support and Maintain that Liberty, in which Christ has made us free, and will not suffer it to be invaded, or indanger'd under any the most plausible Colours and Pretensions; and as you will always have our Thanks for so worthy a Conduct, we doubt not you will always have the esteem of those, who have a due Veneration for the Holy Scriptures.

F I N I S.



to Ceremonies in religious Worship and Tolle-  
 tistical Discipline; that We approve of former  
 up, or countenancing Forms of Man's invention  
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